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Social and Political Fractures after Wars

The Role of Youth Violence in post-1993 Cambodia

Project Working Paper No. 4

*Social and Political Fractures after Wars:
Youth Violence in Cambodia and Guatemala*

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The present study is part of the research project on “Social and Political Fractures after Wars: Youth Violence in Cambodia and Guatemala”. The project is financed by the German Foundation for Peace Research and is located at the Institute for Development and Peace at the University of Duisburg-Essen. The project aims at explaining different levels of youth violence in two post-war societies whose processes of war termination are regarded as successful. However, both societies face serious problems of post-war development that are closely related to the experiences of war and war termination. While Cambodia’s democratisation process is considered more or less as a failure, Guatemala suffers from levels of violence higher than during most of the war. The differences between both countries in levels of violence and mechanisms of violence control are also visible in the incidence of youth violence.

The project aims to explain these differences through the contextualisation of youth violence. Thus the main focus is directed at the societal and political fractures war and war termination cause for youth and their life-worlds. The working hypotheses were related to differences according to a) the levels of social differentiation; b) the relationship between political and economic power; c) normative frameworks; and d) the sequencing of post-war developments (namely between liberalisation and stabilisation). This approach has methodological consequences insofar as different levels of youth violence are what we seek to explain. The perspective of the actors themselves is beyond our approach. After having identified the relevant fractures this would be the task of further research.

Following the Working Paper ‘Transitions of Cambodia: War and Peace, 1954 to the present’, this study locates youth and their role in society in the social, economic, and political changes in Cambodia during and after the war. It is the premise of the project that youth focus on them the particular challenges of a society after a civil war as society faces a distinct domestic set-up in which external demands for democratisation, marketisation, and pacification intervene. The paper analyses the emergence of youth violence in this process and the role it plays for youth to find a niche for themselves in the post-war society. It examines lifeworlds of youth and presents youth as perpetrators as well as victims of violence, as they are being used by elites but also autonomously exploit opportunities that arose during the unstable post-war period and have led to patterns of violence by and against youth in present day Cambodia.

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Youth Violence in Cambodia: An Introduction

This study looks at the situation of youth and the origins of youth violence in the post-1993 socio-political set up, which has been dominated by a triple transformation process of democratisation, market reforms, and pacification.¹ As this process was initiated from outside under the UNTAC mission, it met a domestic political set up, in which the ruling CPP under Prime Minister Hun Sen was unwilling to relinquish control over the material and immaterial resources that UNTAC tried to open to public access and subject to democratic legitimacy. The situation of youth in this process and the conditions, under which young people form gangs and resort to violence, are the topics of the study. As the transformation processes are dominated by a political system at the centre of which stands Hun Sen, the study will examine the degree to which political actors utilise youth in order to stay on top of these transformation processes, lead them, and profit from them. Thus, the study will look at two ways in which youth execute violence²: directed from the political system to keep the status quo, and as autonomous reaction to political, economic, and social exclusion.³

There are two broad thrusts in the literature on youth and youth violence in Cambodia⁴: one that sees children and youth mostly as victims of the social, political, and economic realities; and one that observes children and youth within the conflicting areas of personal aspirations and the socio-political set up. This second category concludes that children and youth are victims of the war and post-war economy and political system, but are also perpetrators in that they engage in violence by searching for a way out of their trapped situation between individual ambitions and desires and the low degree to which they can realise them in Cambodian society.

The first category of children and youth as victims is present in a report by UNICEF, written in 1996. The report is important for the understanding of present Cambodian society as it takes us back to the beginnings of post-UNTAC Cambodia. Starting from an analysis of post-civil war Cambodia, UNICEF views children and youth as suffering from the lack of resources available to them. The war had diminished much of the adult population, hence those who would have taken care of children. The reduction of caregivers, so the report, has left many children orphaned, in the care of widowed mothers, or mentally unstable parents, who have not come to terms with the trauma of the war years. This untreated trauma results in

¹ For the historical setting see the working paper on Cambodia's socio-economic development.

² Rather than looking at lethal violence as constitutive element of youth gangs, the study goes deeper by exploring criminal behaviour of youth that is not limited to killings, as is mostly discussed in the literature. Rather, in Cambodia, criminal behaviour of youth mostly comprises robbery, drug-related crime and other non-lethal acts of violence. For a theoretical discussion of these issues see Working Paper 1 by Sabine Kurtenbach (Chapter 1.1).

³ The central pieces of this study are based on field work conducted in Cambodia between mid-May and mid-August 2007. Field work consisted mostly of semi-structured interviews with former gang members, teachers of public schools and schools set up by NGOs, police officials (retired and active), NGO staff, local government officials, researchers, physicians, and members of international NGOs. The field work was conducted in Phnom Penh, in Battambang town and province, and in Pailin town and province (officially named municipality, not province. With reference to Pailin, I will use the terms interchangeably however).

⁴ This discussion is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather outlines broad argumentations in the literature. Authors quoted accordingly should be seen as representative for the line of argument in general.

domestic violence at home with detrimental effects for children's upbringing and education. This, in turn, results in a perpetuation of violence in conflict settlement (UNICEF 1996).

The culture of violence takes much space in the literature of post-1993 Cambodia. Huot (2005), for instance, argues that the perpetuation of violence is helped by the ready access to weapons, which Cambodians kept despite the weapons collection and demobilisation programmes during and after UNTAC. A climate of insecurity that continued after 1993 has led many Cambodians to keep weapons for their own security, thus showing distrust of the government and its security forces. The easy access to weapons also leads to a preference to solve conflicts by force rather than negotiation of contrary points of view. A report on violence against children in Cambodia is among the strongest who report a culture of violence stemming partly from the war, partly from traditional hierarchical Cambodian society, in which it is considered normal for parents and teachers to beat children (Child Welfare Group et. al., no year; published approximately late 2004/early 2005). The report can be seen as a descendent of the domestic violence literature, which has at its core not only violence against women, but often also violence against children as result of traditional roles in which women and children have to obey the husband/father and not rarely are severely beaten for minor instances (for instance Zimmerman 1994).

Huot also notes a lack of access to resources for children in a society, which is characterised by patronage relationships. Roeske (2002) elaborates extensively on this problem. She sees the exclusion of children and youth from resources (education, health care, labour markets) and notes a lack of political will to alter the situation. Corruption in education and health care is unlikely to change, and is an inherent part also of the political system. Furthermore, an ILO report on child labour and a governmental youth risk behaviour survey all view children and youth as victims of neglect and bad governance: corruption and nepotism, through which resources are crammed into the private pockets of a small political and business elite without attention to the needs of the young generation.⁵

The second category of youth literature extends this victim perspective. It takes up the analysis of the first category, but then moves to discuss youth as autonomous actors in Cambodian society. The most important study on this problem was written by Gender and Development for Cambodia in 2003. It largely views gang members as perpetrators of violence, particularly of gang rape, protected by gang leaders' connections to powerful families. But it also views them as victims of a socio-political set up of patronage relations that does not allow them access to resources and representation as a distinct social group within the polity. Youth, then, produce their own social network: the gang, which allows them to access a number of resources, which they cannot get at through formal channels: food, jobs, and protection by other gang members. In the gang, as in society at large, protection is by the powerful leader, who acts as patron for the group's members, who occupy a lower status in the gang's internal patron-client hierarchy (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003).

A book by Ea and Sim takes this perspective back to the Khmer Rouge period, but argues that a functionalisation of children and youth took place in order to use them for the ideological

⁵ ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2004.

goals of the Pol Pot government. The central argument of this book is that youth were perpetrators of physical violence under the Khmer Rouge, but this was because of indoctrination surrounded by a climate of fear of immediate execution, separation from their parents, social isolation, malnutrition, and recurring illnesses (Ea/ Sim 2001).

The study will now look at this situation of youth during the changes brought about by war and the changing roles of children and youth during the times of upheaval and the official end of the civil war in 1991.

1. Youth and Social Change: The Situation until 1979

1.1. Traditional mechanisms of integration before the war

Traditionally in Cambodia, society was held together by a kingship, which saw itself as protector of the people as well as of the monastic community, the sangha. In this system, which saw cooperation between the political and religious elite, social integration was along the lines of Buddhist values and patronage relationships to persons of prestige and influence. The king was the symbol of unity and embodiment of morality. He was the

“dharmaraja: the righteous ruler, embodiment of the dharma, maintainer and supporter of the sasana (religion), benefactor of his people, and source of moral law [...] Politics in Theravada societies is supposed to be chiefly concerned with the morality of the leaders and the welfare brought by their action. Righteous leadership and mass welfare are the basic requirements for the growth of religion, which allows individuals to accumulate merit through donations and good deeds. Power is supposed to reward a good karmic ‘credit’ for past merits, accrued from former lives (Thion 1987:151+152).”

In this set up, the local pagodas had considerable moral weight and influence. In the rural areas, literacy and further education used to be a service of the local pagodas for the villages around it. This was coupled with boys entering the monastery: ‘In the old times, little boys would learn some reading in a pagoda school before they became novices.’ This generally meant that during the times when there were no state schools and every male villager was sent to live in the pagoda for some time, men were literate, but women were not (Kalab 1968:532-533). Young boys could become pagoda boys, helping the monks with shopping or preparing food. Through this prevalence of monastic life and institutions, boys were integrated into the village community. Social control was therefore exercised with the help of the prestige of the local monastic institutions. Monks in return helped the donors to acquire merit, performed religious services at funerals or weddings, lent their prestige to a construction project by contributing labour, or offered literacy and further education (Kalab 1968:531-532).

According to Gender and Development for Cambodia, the concept of youth constitutes a ‘relatively new cultural import to Cambodia’ (Gender and Development 2003:Part III). Traditionally, there were only adults and children, or old and young people. Regarding traditional rites of passage, conversations with survivors of Pol Pot showed that ordaining as a monk was an important rite of passage before 1975 in the countryside and that therefore youth

violence was rare and social cohesion based on Buddhist values strong. Traditional rites of passage, mostly adhered to in the countryside rather than in the cities, were the entrance of the prepubescent phase, a rite which marked the transformation from child to another phase of life shortly before the child begins to develop sexual characteristics. Next were the initiation of the woman and the initiation of the man. The rites for the woman's initiation started with the first menstruation and were designed to prepare the pubescent girl for marriage. Initiation of the man was very different and was aimed at instruction and acquisition of knowledge, which was linked to boys becoming novices for a particular time, usually from two or three months up to one year. They then could choose to leave the monastery. For a boy to be in a monastery was a good sign for the parents of his future wife as to the goodness of his character. Then, the next step into another stage of life for men and women alike was marriage.⁶

Children were additionally integrated in an extended network composed of neighbours and family members, whereby 'neighbours were often relatives.' The household then included one or more grandparents and other relatives, plus mother, father and 'an average of five children.' Migrating family members retained close connections to the family in the village:

"In this situation, there were many persons to share in the care and protection of children. Mothers were responsible for the family's religious observances and for passing social and religious values on to the children. They were also responsible for managing the family's money and for providing the daily needs of children. The father's role was that of provider, either as principle wage earner or as the head of the family farm. While he had less defined responsibilities in terms of nurturing his children, he often passed on skills especially to his son. Grandmothers, as well as older female siblings often spent considerable time caring for young children when the parents were busy with household and farming chores. In the absence of immediate family, there were always the neighbourhood relatives and friends to keep an eye on young ones as they played (UNICEF 1996:33-34)."

In the old times, there were gangs, too, but, according to an English teacher in Battambang, who survived the Khmer Rouge regime, the members of these gangs respected each other and fought according martial arts rules, thus exhibiting ritualised violence in their conflicts:

"In the old times, gangsters did not go ransacking. When contending groups had a problem, the respective persons would fight each other according to martial arts rules. They would meet at an agreed place at an agreed time and then fight, but not kill. They would choose the weapons (knife, stick), and then would fight according to the rules of martial arts. Today, these old gangsters say: we are afraid of the young gangsters. We don't understand them. But there was also rape of girls."⁷

The traditional course of education changed during French colonialism, when the pagoda schools were turned into 'renovated pagoda schools' in 1911 in Battambang and Siem Reap province with a modern curriculum and inspected by the government. At Kalab's time of

⁶ Interview in Phnom Penh, 16 May 2007 and 4 June 2007.

⁷ Interview in Battambang, 10 July 2007.

writing, some villages still had this type of primary school, and sometimes children would still attend informal pagoda schools before they were ready for the 'discipline of State schools'.⁸ The introduction of secular state schools began to eat away the influence of the monasteries in education, a development which extended to other functions such as financial help (banking), medical advice, and architectural assistance (Kalab 1976:67).

The expansion of the education sector under Sihanouk meant that by 1969, more than 11,000 students attended university and at least 2 million primary and secondary schools. This, however, produced social mobility and frustration: more and more segments of the population became better informed and alert, and radical interpretations of Cambodia's society became frequent (Chandler 1991:122-123). This was also an important factor in the alienation of especially urban youth with the Sihanouk state: only a few educated youth could find qualified employment in the undeveloped economy. Together with a detachment process from traditional culture, within which they were no longer receptive for traditional hierarchy and political symbolism, the gap widened between the young educated elite and the Sihanouk state. The fact that by '1970 nearly all Khmers had the opportunity of acquiring basic literacy' was therefore destabilising. The expansion of education happened at a time when the same state was clouded in concepts of monarchy, and thus a potentially explosive situation was created, which would make many young people and intellectuals receptive for the promises of communism.⁹ Kalab reports similarly in relation to political awareness that the people in the village she studied in the 1960s can all read and write except for old women, and that everybody reads the election manifestoes of parliamentary candidates. This is partly owing to the rapid expansion of the primary school sector and the success of the literacy campaign of 1964, which aimed at 'teaching every Khmer person how to read and write within a year, and every foreigner within two years' (Kalab 1968:533).

Kiernan has a more critical view on the levels of education, reminding the reader that the quick expansion of education in the 1960s and the new social opportunities it offered was rather due to the 'mild attempt' of the French to introduce modern public education (Kiernan 1986:xii-xiii). Nevertheless, he agrees that the expansion of the education system under Sihanouk between 1954 and 1970 by 25 percent each year enabled nearly all Khmers to acquire basic literacy by 1970 (Kiernan 1986:xiii-xiv).

Attending secondary schools proved to be a problem for villagers, however, as they were not available in every village. Staying away from the village, however, could produce considerable expenses. This was especially difficult for girls, whereas boys could become novices and enjoy the monastic education system. This started with a Pali school (first introduced in 1933) as the equivalent of a secular elementary school, then led to Buddhist lycées (which used be the Higher Pali Schools) and further to the Buddhist university in Phnom Penh. This system provided a mix of religious training in Buddhist doctrine and Pali language (since 1926 Pali recitations had been supplemented with Khmer translations) and up-to-date training in mathematics, science, history and foreign languages etc. Those who

⁸ Kalab 1968:532-533; Kalab 1976:67.

⁹ Kiernan 1986:xiii-xiv and *ibid.*: xiv cited Nepote 1979:784.

graduated within this system were able to compete for white collar jobs with the urban elite if they wanted to leave monastic life after graduation.¹⁰ Interestingly, Kalab also reports that by the middle of the 20th century, the introduction of state schools threatened to significantly alter the social relations in the villages organised around the monastery, but that the expansion of the Pali schools ‘arrested’ this development as more young men again chose to become novices, which ‘brought new vigour to the monastic institution and this in turn strengthened the whole network of social relations dependent on it’.¹¹ In addition, in 1963, certificates of monastic institutions were regarded as equivalent to those of secular institutions (Kalab 1976:69).

The decline in novices in favour of the secular school system was also related to new perspectives and the imitation of urban styles of life. Therefore, richer areas were more likely to be affected by modernisation than poorer areas, where people stayed traditional owing to a lack of choices (Kalab 1976:64). The equal recognition of monastic and secular degrees again balanced state and religion in Cambodian life. It is thus that Sihanouk until the mid-1960s was able to successfully project the ideal of the Cambodian kingship: that of the protector of the poor and the symbol of unity.

In the cities, the picture looked different. Intellectuals and students perceived political legitimacy to arise from democratic procedures. The crushing of the Democratic Party in 1957 therefore not only robbed them of a political home, but prevented their identification with the Sihanouk state. They therefore stood outside the nation-building process and could not be reached by the cosmology of Sihanouk’s reign, nor by policies such as Buddhist socialism, which failed to cater to their economic and social aspirations, i.e. finding employment commensurate with their education. As a result, the urban centres and the rural areas pursued at least partially different points of identification and ideas of political legitimacy, whereby the urban areas and in particular Phnom Penh had been seeing the influx of foreign ideas mostly via France in the early beginnings of globalisation. As we shall see later in this study, Phnom Penh today is still host to the strongest opposition to Hun Sen, whereas he is in strong control of the rural areas. In that sense, we can observe a continuity of urban opposition to authoritarian rule and at the same time control over the rural majority areas by the governing party within a system of formal democracy.

1.2. The end of tradition? Destruction of social relations under the Khmer Rouge

When Sihanouk was deposed in 1970 by army leader Lon Nol, this was greeted with enthusiasm by the urban elite, who saw an end to the corrupt and repressive Sihanouk regime. Disappointment set in quickly, however, when Lon Nol turned out to be no less corrupt and repressive than Sihanouk. In the countryside meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge garnered support from a population that fled US bombs and North Vietnamese expansions on Cambodian territory. When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh in April 1975 and abolished Lon

¹⁰ Kalab 1968:534; Kalab 1976:68-69+71; Kiernan 1986:20.

¹¹ Kalab 1968:535; Kalab 1976:63+67-68.

Nol's Khmer Republic, they moved to abolish traditional Cambodian society altogether and the mechanisms by which children and youth were integrated.

Part of the Khmer rouge troops were children and youth. An estimated 2000 children formed part of the Khmer Rouge armed forces between 1975 and 1979 (Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:2+3). However, as the Red Cross noted, between 1970 and 1975, Lon Nol's army as well as the Khmer Rouge guerrilla fighters 'conscripted village youth throughout the nation and fought scores of battles in villages' (International Committee of the Red Cross 1999:24+27).¹² The repressions, which followed the capture of Phnom Penh, were especially effective through the use of child soldiers, whose personality could be formed during childhood and trained for combat as 'human landmines' in a detachment process from a cultural identity based on Buddhist morality and strong family bonds, which were crucial for the survival of the individual in a society characterised by patron-client relations. Children over six years were separated from their parents and brought into labour camps. The collapse of the education system meant that formal education was only to be delivered through political indoctrination programmes in labour camps, village meetings, and military training camps. Through that children were re-educated to serve the goals of the government. These included the use of weapons and landmines, and spying on their parents while being told that they lived in a hostile environment disposed to kill them.¹³

The Maoist policies of the Khmer Rouge left 1.7 million people dead, one-third of the population at that time. The destruction of social relations during the Pol Pot regime meant the destruction of bonds between youth and 'normative society' through a series of institutions such as school, sports, music, and arts associations or religious organisations (Youniss/ Yates 1999:2). If they are destroyed in violent settings which disrupt the normal development of autonomy in children through a loss of security and a loss of trust between the generations as well as peers, these processes of socialisation do not work anymore.¹⁴

2. Youth and Violence in the Conflict Area between War and Peace: Reconstruction amidst War, 1979-1993

The Vietnamese invasion of December 1978 removed the Pol Pot regime, the remnants of which fled to the Thai border to fight against the new government. The new government was composed of former Khmer Rouge and members of the old elite, most importantly Buddhist clergy. The socialist party system, introduced by the new government of the Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) provided social control as much as possible in the post-1979 confusion and factual partition of the country in zones of influence between the Vietnam-installed government, the Khmer Rouge, the Front Uni Nationale pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC) and the Khmer People's

¹² See also Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2004.

¹³ Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:3; Ebiara 1987:27, 29, 33-35; International Committee of the Red Cross 1999:8+26-29; Ea/ Sim 2001.

¹⁴ Youniss/ Yates 1999:2; Hart/ Mojica 2006:249.

National Liberation Front (KPNLF). At the same time, the international community did not recognise the new government and the Khmer Rouge kept the Cambodian seat at the United Nations. Cambodia was sealed off, with the notable exception of Vietnam. Vietnam, however, was sealed off, too, owing to its invasion of Cambodia, surviving economically only through its links to the Soviet bloc.

Under the difficulties of international isolation, the post-1979 leadership moved to restore traditional family relations, reopened schools and put an end to the extreme collectivisation of social and economic life under the Khmer Rouge. Youth also were given a positive role in the reconstruction of communities: while children were used under the Khmer Rouge to destruct traditional habits and create a new society, Sophie Quinn-Judge explains that after 1979, young people actively engaged in rebuilding Cambodia's economy: 'One recent report notes a government-sponsored "food for work" program in several provinces whereby voluntary agencies provide food to young people selected and sent by their villages to work for two weeks on projects such as irrigation systems. These are not, however, the permanent mobile work teams of the DK [Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979] period, and such work stints are even welcomed by young women as a chance to get out of their villages.'¹⁵

At the same time, the old vertical relations of patronage and clientelism re-emerged surrounding a new group of politicians around the new head of state Heng Samrin. Hun Sen became foreign minister. Members of the Buddhist clergy were put again in high positions, which created the political links between the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and Buddhists of the Mohanikay order, to which most Cambodian Buddhists belong (the smaller Dhammayuth order is associated with the monarchy).

At the same time, the political elite has been trying to create an authoritarian approach to control youth¹⁶ through socialist mass organisations (associations) for youth and women after 1979. A formalisation took place in early 1993 during the temporary government between July and November, when the Ministry for Women, Youth and Sports was created. After the 1993 elections, Women were separated from Sports. Instead, it was created a Secretariat of State for Women, while Youth and Sports joined the Ministry of Education, which became today's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS).

By making Buddhism part of the new political order, the functions of Buddhism were recreated, while its intellectual basis remained thin after the cataclysms of the Khmer Rouge period. As a consequence, as the director of a Battambang NGO mentioned, Buddhism has not found an answer to materialism and globalisation after 1991. It therefore finds it difficult to counteract the loss of attraction among the young population.¹⁷ As the International Committee of the Red Cross noted for Cambodia, members of the older generation often

¹⁵ Ebihara 1987:37 cited Quinn-Judge, 1982:23.

¹⁶ This paragraph is based on the explanations given in an interview by Lak Sam Ath, Secretary General of National Association of Cambodian Scouts, and Director General of the Directorate General of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The interview was conducted in Phnom Penh on 9 August 2007.

¹⁷ Interview in Battambang, 20 July 2007.

‘bemoan the religious and cultural ignorance of today’s youth, and what they see as indifference to morality’ owing to the war and the influx of foreign cultures: they do not respect the old generation, Buddhist principles, or Khmer customs; some take guns with them to school; some kill; young people mentioned that ‘war has stopped Cambodian economic and political progress’ and destroyed opportunities for education (International Committee of the Red Cross 1999:8-9).

Part of this problem seems a post-1991 flood of values unknown to Cambodians, who spent the war years in the country. The observation of an NGO member active in weapons reduction interviewed in Cambodia in May 2007 that Cambodians are ‘stressed’ given the constant changes of regimes and ideologies after 1970 fits this picture.¹⁸ A human rights activist also mentioned that since 1991, the ‘situation is confusing’ as a wave of unknown concepts came in: democracy, globalisation, human rights, gender, political parties, dollars.¹⁹ This was at a point at which Cambodian society and education had not yet been re-established in the midst of continued fighting. The disruption of families, ‘which provide the first safety net for survival, protection and healthy development of children, have been fragmented and weakened by death and separation.’ Villages have experienced the dislocation or destruction of extended family networks and an influx of people alien to the village communities (UNICEF 1996:33), which were fleeing, being resettled or demobilised at different stages of the conflict between 1968 and the demobilisation programmes in the early 2000s. For children, this meant fewer caregivers, reduction of the ability to provide care, and a lack of resources available to caregivers ‘to support the survival, socialisation, and education of the children in their care’ (UNICEF 1996:33).

3. The Post-war Society as Life World of Youth and Context of Youth Violence

3.1. Democratisation, pacification, and economic liberalisation

On a general note, changing political contexts such as the end of the Cold War, the abolishment of repressive governments, or the end of decades of civil war produce different political and economic contexts, in which youth are thrown on their way to adulthood. The current adult generation might not always understand these contexts and their values and therefore may not function as role models of how to grow up in these contexts and values:

“This required abandonment of political principles and the attainment of totally unfamiliar political practices such as voting in free elections, assembling in public, protesting against government decisions, or simply discussing politics with one’s neighbor without fear of reprisal. [...] these political practices constitute the meaning of democracy. Without these practices, democracy, as a formal system, has no meaning for people’s lives.”²⁰

¹⁸ Interview in Phnom Penh, 27 May 2007.

¹⁹ Interview in Phnom Penh, 1 June 2007.

²⁰ Youniss/ Yates 1999:3 cited Noack/ Hofer/ Youniss 1995.

Conflicts of interest therefore arise ‘when any society or group of people meet forces of change [...] some adapt by assimilating features of modernization-individuality, while others retain major parts of their prior, more traditional culture’ (Youniss/ Noack/ Hofer 1995:5). Traditionally, in Cambodian society a powerful person is characterised as ‘oppressive, strict, aggressive, uses violence, no one would dare to contradict, orders people and no one can resist, has high connections, wealthy, high ability, need not follow the law.’ In contrast, persons of lower status are supposed ‘to respect their role, bend lower, do not disagree with anything’.²¹

The influence of youth on the reconstruction of Cambodia has thus been limited. But they take over responsibilities in the home and in the economic survival of the family, especially in the poorer social strata. In this situation, the transition from childhood to adulthood is overlaid by their position as child within the family. This gives rise to conflicts between generations (Roeske 2002:6-17). Youth are therefore caught in between this division of tradition and modernity. Youth culture emerged as a product of globalisation with new life styles and status symbols, such as motorcycles, mobile phones, jeans, and pop music. This emergence of a new social group contrasts with the ‘exclusion of the young from national economies’.²² The rise of youth as new consumer group with distinct life styles produced new identities, which led to conflicts with teachers and parents as traditional patterns of interaction lost their value inside the new group.²³

Broadhurst explains that ‘Cambodia is still in the crucial stages of state formation and democratization following decades of war, genocide, insurrection and widespread civil dislocation’ (Broadhurst, unpublished draft:2). Thavory Huot wrote that the civil war poisoned human relationships, spread mistrust and has left an excess of weapons in the hands of civilians looking for security (Huot 2005:36). The presence of weapons in this problem constellation continues to threaten the relative stability that was reached after the elections of 1998 as weapons have a ‘direct negative impact on community development, human security, human rights and public health. Landmines have taken a devastating post-war toll.’ The unfair distribution of resources (land, water, forests) undermines the livelihood of ‘a majority of people.’ Consequently, ‘with no official political recourse for reconciliation or reparations from the past, fear, mistrust and a deep malaise of suspicion and insecurity abound’.²⁴

For youth, therefore, the end of war means a new context within which life has to be reorganised. In theory, **democratisation** is linked to increased options for participation. This, however, was not the case in Cambodia post 1991: the continued dominance of the CPP over the state apparatus during UNTAC and the reorganisation of patronage relations behind the democratic institutions after 1993 meant that power resources did not come from democratic legitimisation (elections), but from the allocation of resources through patron-client relations.

²¹ Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three cited O’Leary/ Nee 2001:54.

²² Comaroff/ Comaroff 2005; Milnitsky 2006:196-197; Gender and Development for Cambodia, 2003: Part Three.

²³ Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three; Roeske 2002:6; Milnitsky 2006:203.

²⁴ Huot 2005:36; Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006:11.

A manifestation of this is the disregard of the 1993 election results by the CPP, which prolonged the political instability into 1998, when the second elections brought about a more sustainable balance of power between CPP and FUNCINPEC, with the CPP permanently on top of the political hierarchy.

A result of this is a feeling among youth of being left out of political decisions. As for the participation of youth in elections, COMFREL notes that young women are discouraged (actively or passively) by their traditional role in the house, while young men do not show an interest in the elections, citing a general feeling of disenfranchisement from the political processes and lack of influence on political decision-making. In addition, the cost of transportation for migrant youth workers from their work places in the cities and neighbouring countries (e.g. Thailand) prevents them from travelling to their home province to cast their vote. Political parties, the government, and the National Assembly are viewed as not paying attention to the needs of youth (COMFREL 2007a:13 and 2007b). The abstention of youth from the electoral processes (lack of interest, lack of funds, lack of inclusion) is the more worrisome since over 30 percent or more than four million people of the 14 million Cambodians are made up of persons under the age of thirty (numbers as of 2005). Since 2005, the number of under thirty-year olds has grown by 200,000-300,000 persons per year (COMFREL 2007b:1).

Perhaps the most complex issue in this socio-political set up is a lack of resources. After the war, land was scarce due to land mines and an increase in population. Erosion made many areas less fertile. Economic growth during the UNTAC phase was between 4 and 8 percent, but most of it centred in Phnom Penh owing to the service sector catering to UNTAC personnel with 'little impact on the rest of the country'.²⁵ Thus, in the mid-1990s, opportunities for private business were 'extremely limited. Poor farmers and the unskilled must work as day labourers to make ends meet. It is widely agreed that poverty is more prevalent in Cambodia now [1996] than in 1970, although exact statistics are unavailable. The scarcity of resources available to caregivers means that children are less likely to be adequately housed, clothed and fed.' Children have to contribute to the family income and sometimes 'work full-time as vendors' in the city. Others 'work as servants for more prosperous relatives or other families in the cities. For their labours, they receive basic care or very low pay, and are kept too busy with housework and childcare to be able to attend school. In rural areas, they may spend entire days tying thatch, splitting kindling for sale, or working in the fields.' Access to education and health is costly, and there are cases in which 'families or individuals fall into chronic cycles of destitution and vulnerability as a result of high medical costs.' Poverty is perpetuated by an 'ineffective public education system' (UNICEF 1996:36-37).

This situation has not changed a lot. Today, economic growth centres on Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville and Siem Reap, and a majority of youth finds employment in the informal sector only. In 2002, Roeske noted multiple social exclusions of children and youth from

²⁵ Royal Government of Cambodia 1996:5; UNICEF 1996:25-27.

Cambodian society, regarding access to jobs, education and health care, high quality of which can be accessed through corruption only (Roeske 2002). In 2002, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSALVY) published a strategy paper, outlining the needs for youth rehabilitation. The paper announced the need to take care of children and juveniles aged 7-18, who are involved in 'delinquent behaviour' such as drug use and prostitution. Significantly, the report noted a new phenomenon of delinquency of juveniles aged 18 or younger after 1993 especially in the urban areas. Crimes committed by youth include stealing, robbery, substance abuse with negative effects for national security, social order, culture, tradition and the national economy (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation 2002:37-38).

How the effects manifest, for instance in relation to national security, the report unfortunately does not specify. However, it mentions youth violence as a post-1993 phenomenon and acknowledges problems that were already discussed in the above-quoted UNICEF report six years earlier: the civil war along with natural disasters has caused widespread poverty, which the post-war period did little to eradicate. As a result, many children were left to live by themselves, responsible for finding their own food. Others have to work to contribute to the family income (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation 2002:38).

In 2003, the Youth Council of Cambodia published a pamphlet demanding changes, including: democratic reform including equal access to media for all political parties, elimination of corruption, rule of law, better access to health care especially for children and the poor, better access to education for the poor including raises in teachers' salaries, elimination of corruption and impunity, economic reforms to provide more jobs, and tackling the problem of landlessness (Youth Council of Cambodia 2003). Poor funding of public schools fosters corruption in schools, because teachers in public schools earn 45 US Dollars a month and therefore have to supplement their salary in order to support their family. There are essentially three ways of how to do this: some teachers drive mototaxis after work; others teach only basic knowledge in the regular classes and the more important things in private classes; and a third group asks children to bring money to school every day if they want to have classes beyond the first half of the months, when the teacher's salary is used up.

We see that the Youth Council's demands are centred around the problem of elite access to resources, whether material or immaterial (land, jobs, health, and education). Roeske argues that poverty is inextricably linked to access to or control of resources, including land, skills, knowledge, social mobility, and capital. Young people, who owing to their living conditions are defenceless and restricted and do not have access to institutions, markets, work, and public services do not have the potential to develop and put their energies and potentials into the reconstruction of the society they live in (Roeske 2002:5, also 1). Integration of youth into society and their participation in social processes therefore relies on access to these resources. These, however, are occupied by an elite political system, which is characterised by neo-patrimonial structures and in which resources are allocated inside an extended family network at the centre of which stands Prime Minister Hun Sen. We will return to this problem later in more detail.

The result is that '[w]ith limited legitimate forms of social representation available', youth create new structures to achieve social visibility. Youth gangs are one of these structures (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three). Moreover,

“[i]n the past, wealthy Khmer children, who aspired to positions of power had to wait until adulthood to realise these goals as their family kept them in check. However, with the 1980's and 90's a new phase of life known as 'youth' appeared, one that brought new constraints and opportunities for social action. This provided an opportunity [...] to gain peer respect now. Through forming structures of patronage known as youth gangs, they filled a momentary vacuum of power amongst young people and restoring the predominant social order (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three).”

Furthermore, a combination of poverty and a corrupt police and justice system leads to individual legitimisation of violence for the creation of justice in a corrupt and distrusted police and justice system.

Youth gangs and their conflicts are therefore an option for gang members to express self-determination and their place in society, something which school and government are not able to achieve for them (Daiute 2006:13). However, the most common reason for joining a gang is peer pressure; and by joining a gang, youth also join a network of patronage (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two). They thereby supplement the closed-off elite systems with their own social structure.

Numerical estimates of violence in general and more so in relation to youth are hard to find and if found are highly unreliable, especially as regards murder and homicide.²⁶ Broadhurst's compilation from various sources of crime across Cambodia shows declining numbers of violent deaths since 1998. The following table is taken from Broadhurst (unpublished draft: 24; explanations *ibid.* 21-23):

²⁶ See Broadhurst's extensive analysis on this (Broadhurst, unpublished draft).

Estimates of the prevalence of homicide, 1992-2003²⁷

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1996^a	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Murder events	429	599	303	397	542	542	793	581	580 ^c	560	527	509
Rate	4.76	6.30	3.03	3.78	4.93	5.70	6.50	4.68	4.60	4.37	4.05	3.83
Grenade events	40	157	79	27	54	54	68	42	39	21	10	23
Rate	0.44	1.65	0.79	0.25	0.49	0.57	0.56	0.34	0.31	0.16	0.08	0.17
Estimated victims	487	1008	427	551*	775*	775*	1119*	810*	805*	851	698*	691*
Rate A	5.35	10.61	4.27	5.25	7.05	8.18	9.25	6.53	6.39	6.65	5.37	5.19
'Offender' deaths	n/a	214	42	34	108	108	96 ^b	51 ^b	40 ^b	25 ^b	21 ^b	20 ^b
Rate	–	2.25	0.42	0.32	0.98	1.14	0.79	0.41	0.32	0.19	0.16	0.15
All deaths	487	1222	469	585	883	883	1215	861 ^d	845	876	719	711 ^d
Rate B	5.41	12.86	4.69	5.57	8.03	9.32	10.04	6.94	6.71	6.84	5.53	5.35

Source: RGC MOI Reports of Judicial Police Centre 1998, 1999-2003.

Notes: *a* = rates adjusted for missing provincial data; *b* = number of offender fatalities from newspaper sources (non-fatal cases are recorded as follows: 1998 = 1, 1999 = 13, 2000 = 19, 2001 = 17, 2002 = 12, 2003 = 5); *c* = 2001 MOI year-on-year murder comparison figures reported; *d* = 14 deaths in 1999 and 24 deaths in 2003 are ambiguously noted in the MOI reports under cases 'suppressed' but are not added here to the estimated number of offender deaths; n/a = data not available; * = multiplier of 1.3 fatalities per event; estimates for 1997 not attempted and; the number of offender fatalities available from official sources for 1992, 1993, 1994 and 2001 only.

The statistics are not broken down by age, so crime by and against youth cannot be seen. An age-based compilation from the Khmer language newspapers Koh Santepheap and Rasmey Kampuchea for the first six months of 2007 gives some glimpses into numbers of youth crime.²⁸ Both newspapers list a combined number of 216 events, which involved youth (gangs and individuals) either as perpetrators, victims, or both (when a juvenile offender attacked a juvenile victim). Of these 216 events, 85 were assaults by juveniles in groups of two or more (the largest group consisted of 20 juveniles), resulting in 9 reported deaths (one of them murder-robbery) and several serious injuries with uncertain outcomes. Of the 85 cases, 29 were robberies, 5 rapes, 2 fights between gangs, and the remaining cases assaults and incidents of trouble making caused by drugs and alcohol. The geographical distribution of these 85 cases by province is as follows:

²⁷ 'Offender deaths': extrajudicial killings of suspects by police, militia, or mob violence. 'Rate': events per 100,000 population. 'Rate A': events per 100,000 population excluding offender deaths. 'Rate B': events per 100,000 population including offender deaths

²⁸ My gratitude goes to Huot Thavory for compiling the material.

Phnom Penh: 31	Kampong Speu: 3
Battambang: 13	Kampong Thom: 2
Kampong Cham: 6	Pursat: 2
Prey Veng: 5	Takeo: 2
Kandal: 5	Svay Rieng: 2
Kampot: 4	Kampong Chhnang: 2
Banteay Meanchey: 3	Stung Treng: 1
Koh Kong: 3	Sihanoukville: 1

Source: Huot Thavory's compilation, July 2007.

Within Battambang, the geographical distribution by district was as follows: 3 in Battambang district, 2 in Mong Russei, 1 in Ratanak Mondol, 1 in Sampou Loun, 1 in Tmar Kol, 1 in Bavel, and 4 in Battambang province without further regional specification.

The prevalence of robbery either for drugs or simple self-enrichment, and the frequency of trouble making exemplify the aim of youth to gain status and visibility through gang membership. The focus is therefore on self-enrichment and the display of a hedonistic attitude expressed through alcohol and drugs rather than homicide or murder. The formation of youth gangs as a social structure in the absence of access to democratic access to resources, hence a supplementary system to the existing social order, is reflected by these numbers.

This puts the relationship between **pacification** and post-war socialisation into focus. Important issues to give youth social visibility are changes in hierarchical families and schools, the initiation of a discourse on the civil war and its repercussions for social cohesion, as well as working on non-violent forms of conflict settlement (Huot 2005). Non-violent forms of conflict settlement were not under consideration after 1993, since fighting continued and child soldiers were conscripted by all parties. After 1993, the Khmer Rouge continued to recruit child soldiers (LICADHO 1997:3-4). The government army of the post-1993 state also continued to recruit child soldiers, even though Cambodian law did not allow this: a law dating from the State of Cambodia (1989-1993) set the minimum age to 18 years for military service. Child soldiers were found particularly in the north-western areas, where fighting against the Khmer Rouge guerrilla continued (Battambang, Kampong Speu, Oddar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey), but also in other areas, such as Kratie province. During the CPP-FUNCINPEC clashes in the coup of 1997, both CPP and FUNCINPEC units were discovered to have employed child soldiers in the northern conflict provinces. Military commanders often made use of the fact that children join the army in order to earn an income for their families, are orphaned, or follow their soldier fathers. Forced conscription into government forces did not seem to be regular practice (LICADHO 1997:3, 4-7). Apart from active service, children were forced by government forces and Khmer Rouge guerrilla into support functions, such as carrying ammunition, planting mines or spying. Furthermore, villages in the northern provinces recruited child soldiers into their own militias (LICADHO 1997:7-8).

A central rite of passage in child development is the independence of parents, no matter whether this is achieved through integration in the formal or informal working sector. International demands for **economic liberalisation** have led to ambivalent results in Cambodia, however. As part of economic liberalisation, the influence of globalisation on youth culture should not be underestimated given the opposition of educated youth in Phnom Penh to the regime of Hun Sen. This opposition is partly fuelled by the fact that Cambodia's post-war economic development is largely confined to the cities of Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville and Siem Reap. Furthermore, it concentrates on the sectors of tourism, construction, and textiles. The result of this situation is internal migration from the countryside particularly to Phnom Penh, where big city opportunities and hopes for obtaining a job and sending money back home to the family in the rural area confluence with symbols of youth culture such as pop music and jeans. The government is at pains of bringing the 300,000 people, who annually enter the employment market, into jobs, but so far has failed to meet this goal. The population currently grows at 1.9 percent annually, with 60 percent of the population being under 25 years. In 2002, Roeske noted that 15 percent of the population are wage labourers. 80 percent of these work in agriculture. Cambodia has one of the highest rates of working children between 10 and 14 years in East and Southeast Asia. 42 percent of youth between the ages of 14 and 17 work. Especially in the rural areas, children need to help in agriculture. In the cities, children get their income mostly from the informal sector (beggars, rubbish collectors, rickshaw drivers, carrier of goods, work in the fishing and brick producing industry, in construction, factories, and as sex workers) (Roeske 2002:6-17).

This situation not only affects youth arriving from the rural areas to find work in the garment (girls) and construction (boys) sectors, but also the university graduates, which are unable to find jobs commensurate with their education. It is particularly the second group, which may turn into a politically explosive force, as the precarious employment situation leaves especially the educated urban youth with a feeling of disenfranchisement and puts them in potential opposition to Hun Sen and the CPP. It is against this background that a military service law was passed in October 2006 as a means to put this group under government supervision and at least into temporary employment (for more details see later in this study). Morris listed numbers for unemployed youth in Phnom Penh, applying two definitions of unemployment: those actively seeking work, and those not working but being available to work. In the first instance, unemployment would be less than 1 percent in 2004. Unemployment rates in Phnom Penh were 6.2 percent for teenagers aged 15-18 years and 7.8 percent for young adults aged 20-24 years during 2004. If the second definition is applied, the unemployment rate for young people in Phnom Penh would be at 20.1 percent, that is, 27.8 percent for teenagers 15-19 years, and 16.6 percent for young adults aged 20-24 years (Morris 2007).

3.2. Different life worlds or similar life worlds? A comparison of Phnom Penh, Battambang and Pailin

3.2.1. Statistical overview

How does the picture look like in the areas under examination? The section will start with some statistics in order to put the situation in the three localities into the Cambodian context. Less than two percent of children between the ages of 7 and 14 are employed in the formal economy (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:26). According to the Economic Institute of Cambodia, this is due to a quick growth of the informal economy aided by ‘bureaucracy, corruption and the high cost of operating a business in the formal economy; mass poverty, inadequate economic growth; a surplus of labour; and the elimination of the worldwide quota system governing garment exports’ (Economic Institute of Cambodia 2006:15). In terms of GDP, the contribution of the informal sector to the economy has declined from 70 percent in 1998 to 64 percent in 2000 and 62 percent in 2003, but is still ‘significant.’ In terms of work force, the percentage of all people employed in the informal economy has remained stable at 85 percent since 1998 (Economic Institute of Cambodia 2006:14, Table 2.1).

Repercussions of the war are still significant among the migrant population: of the 4.5 million migrants in Cambodia in 2004, 13.54 percent were on the move owing to repatriation or return after displacement. Work-related migration occurs among 15.12 percent of migrants: 12.18 percent were in search of employment, 2.94 percent transferred their work place. The largest portion, 44.00 percent, migrated because the ‘family moved’ (National Institute of Statistics 2005a:32, Table 2.12). However, as the report states, the work-related numbers ‘underestimate the importance of employment for migration because among many of those who reported that they migrated because their family had moved, the family had moved because one of its members had found a job or was searching for employment’ (National Institute of Statistics 2005a:30). The highest density of migrants in Cambodia is in Battambang and Pailin provinces: data from the Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey (CIPS) show a combined recent migrant population of 45.52 percent for both areas (National Institute of Statistics 2005a:29, Map 3). 5.05 percent of migrants moved to Battambang and Pailin provinces for reasons of repatriation or return after displacement. 20.31 percent of migrants moved to Battambang and Pailin provinces for economic reasons (National Institute of Statistics 2005a:33, Map 4).

Across Cambodia, 5-year migrants are distributed over the age categories as follows:

5-year migrants					
Age group	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24
Percent	4.81	8.9	10.2	11.5	21.1

Source: National Institute of Statistics 2005a:36, Table 2.13.

At the same time, the age group 7-14 shows an average ‘labour force participation rate’ of 16.24 percent, whereby the highest score is for the 14 year olds at 36 percent (National Institute of Statistics 2005b:34, Table 2.16).

As for unpaid family workers, the picture looks the following:

Age group	5-9	10-14	15-19
Percent	97.5	93.3	80.1

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2005b:35, Table 2.17.

The number of children and youth working and attending school at the same time increases between the ages 7 to 11 from 62.90 percent to 80.50 percent. Then the enrolment ratio decreases between the ages 12 and 20 from 76.12 percent to 4.77 percent (National Institute of Statistics 2005b:35, Table 2.18).

Literacy in Battambang and Pailin provinces equals the national average (numbers in percent, Phnom Penh is highest, the last row shows the lowest data in Cambodia):

Age Group	7 and above	7-14	15 and above
National average	74.4	76.4	73.6
Battambang and Pailin	74.5	74.8	74.4
Phnom Penh	89.9	90.6	88.8
Kratie, Mondulkiri, Rattanakiri, Preah Vihear, and Stung Treng	59.9	56.9	61.2

Source: National Institute of Statistics 2005c:10, Table 2.6).

The percentage of children and youth attending schools or educational institutions lies at 86.8 percent for the 7-14 year olds, at 48.7 percent for the 15-19 year olds, and at 9.1 percent for the 20 to 24 year olds (National Institute of Statistics 2005c:25, Table 2.16). Schooling increases between the ages of 7 and 12 (from 70.2 percent to 91.8 percent) and then decreases from 89.0 percent at the age of 13 to 21.1 percent at the age of 19. Older age groups are not shown (National Institute of Statistics 2005c:24, Table 2.17).

Estimates show that in 2001, nation wide 52 percent of children between the ages of 7 and 14, or 1.4 million children, were economically active. Below the age of 12, one-third of the children were economically active (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:13. The figures are based on the 2001 Report on Cambodia Child Labour Survey). The following table shows regional numbers for children's involvement in economic activity and school attendance (numbers are approximations in percent):

	School	Economic activity
Phnom Penh	80	20
Battambang	80	25
Pailin	60	20
Cambodia	80.1 (2.2 million)	52.3 (1.4 million)

Source: ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:11, Figure 8.

The frequency of overlaps between school attendance and economic activity cannot be discerned from the figures. On average in Cambodia, the situation looks as follows (numbers in percent):

School	36.5
Economic activity	8.6
Both	43.7
Neither	11.3

Source: ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:10, Table 2.

The involvement of 43.7 percent of children in both schooling and economic activity had detrimental effects on literacy and numeracy. The fact that more than half of the children are economically active results in late school entries (peak at 11 years) and early dropouts. Around 16 percent are economically active at the age of 6, more than half at the age of 10. At 15, more work than attend school (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:14-16 and 35-36).

With regard to health, it was found that '[e]ducational attainment has a negative effect on the probability of falling ill, suggesting that more education allows a child greater control over the environment in which he or she operates. A child with completed primary education has a probability of falling ill four percentage points lower than that of a child without complete primary education' (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:37). As for non-economic activity, which comprises housework, volunteer and community service, 79 percent of children between the ages of 7 and 14 worked in the household of parents or guardians. Economic and non-economic activities combined, it emerges that 81 percent of children, or 2.8 million, are involved in work (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:17). Over 750.000 children are below the minimum working age of 12, and 500.000 children of the age group 12-14 are below the minimum age for hazardous work.

Interestingly, for domestic migrants, the CIPS migration report states that literacy is high among migrants, adults and minors:

Age group	10-14	15-29
Migrants	85.6 (71.2 not completed primary education)	80.8 (34,0 not completed primary education)
Non-migrants	88.0 (76.0 not completed primary education)	81.8 (38.5 not completed primary education)

Source: National Institute of Statistics 2005a:46, Table 2.18; National Institute of Statistics 2005c:19, Table 2.12.

The percentage of children and youth without completed primary education who at the same time show a high degree of literacy is astonishing, but the level of literacy, which could illuminate this connection, is not further explained.

Divided by gender and region, the distribution of literacy looks as follows:

Sex	Total, urban, rural	Percentage literate	
		1998	2004
Both sexes	Total	62.8	74.4
	Urban	75.5	83.5
	Rural	60.3	72.7
Males	Total	71.0	82.1
	Urban	82.1	88.9
	Rural	68.8	80.8
Females	Total	55.4	67.4
	Urban	69.3	78.6
	Rural	52.7	65.3

In Battambang and Pailin, literacy of children without completed primary education is as follows (for comparison, the regions with the highest and lowest rates are shown as well):

Age group	7-14	15 and above
National average	86.9	28.6
Battambang and Pailin	88.1	35.6
Phnom Penh	-	9.1
Kampong Chhnang	94.2	43.8
Kratie, Mondulhiri, Rattanakiri, Preah Vihear, and Stung Treng	38.9	-

National Institute of Statistics 2005c:28, Table 2.20; National Institute of Statistics 2005c:29, Table 2.21.

3.2.2. Migration

In the context of economic development, illegal migration is a further problem in child work.²⁹ Migration can be cut down into several categories: domestic migration, migration out, and migration in. The latter is feared to contribute to gang violence due to the US policy of expelling criminal youth of Cambodian origin without US citizenship, some of which are members of a gang in the United States, to Cambodia under the bilateral Repatriation Agreement of March 2001.³⁰ As of 2005, 127 Cambodians had been deported (Schwartzapfel 2005). The most popular international destinations for Cambodian migrants are South Korea,

²⁹ Maltoni writes that that as of October 2005, there were 182,007 Cambodian migrants registered with the Thai Ministry of Interior, among them 123,998 male and 57,581 female migrants, making up 13 percent of all registered migrants in Thailand. The number of undocumented migration is not known, but is estimated to be as high as the number of official migration (Maltoni 2006:24).

³⁰ Fenn 2007; Mintier 2002.

Malaysia, Thailand and Japan. Official migration is through collaboration of government agencies and private licensed recruitment agencies: the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training runs annual information campaigns for job seekers to register with placement offices of the municipal or provincial Department of Labour and Vocational Training. Those registered are passed on for selection to the recruitment agencies. As of August 2006, there were 38 recruitment agencies for different countries, four of which worked for different countries at the same time: 2 for South Korea, 11 for Malaysia, 19 for Thailand, and 10 for Japan. The candidates are then asked to submit an application and information form to the relevant agencies and are asked to register with the Department of Employment and Manpower, 'which issues them with a migrant worker card allowing them to obtain a passport from the Ministry of Interior.' The receiving country then provides the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training with a quota of migrants and lists of economic sectors for which migrants are sought (Maltoni 2006:18-19).

There are, however, a number of illegal establishments, which masquerade as official recruitment agencies, but in reality sell Cambodians willing to migrate off as slave labourers or sex workers to Malaysia and other countries. Especially for the illiterate rural population, it is difficult to distinguish between illegal and official agencies. They are therefore likely to fall prey to trafficking activities. A further difficulty is that some recruitment agencies of shady prominence collect fees in advance from migrant workers and then disappear with the money altogether.³¹ Maltoni reports a case, in which a recruitment agency was suspected of trafficking migrants to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The case was reported to the anti-trafficking unit of the Ministry of Interior. In March 2006, Hun Sen made a public speech asking recruitment agencies not to collect money from migrants in advance of sending them to the host country (Maltoni 2006:22).

It seems that no definitive action was taken, however: 'as of October 2006, the costs which migrant workers can and cannot be charged remain undefined. The absence of legislation that clearly defines the recruitment process and related costs means that the amount migrant workers are charged to secure employment overseas varies greatly' between one and four months of salary. Apart from charges, sanctions for malpractice and criteria for the operation of a recruitment agency are also missing in legislation (Maltoni 2006:22).

It is interesting here that in relation to trafficking, local and central government authorities do not always work together. In an interview with a police officer of the Battambang provincial police commissariat, the officer complained that the Anti-Trafficking and Minor Protection Office of the police commissariat of Battambang province does not have control over trafficking across the border to Thailand. He explained that the anti-trafficking office in the Ministry of Interior is in charge of controlling the border for traffickers, and border security is under the control of the border patrol, which is under the Ministry of Interior, too. So far, there is no cooperation of the Ministry of Interior with the provincial anti-trafficking police. In order to have more clout over trafficking from Battambang to Thailand, he has prepared a

³¹ Interviews in the Departments of Social Affairs in Pailin, 23 July 2007, and Battambang, 27 July 2007.

letter to the ministry (which he showed to the author and his translator), in which he asked to send provincial anti-trafficking police to the Thai border.³²

Migration to the peanut farms along the border to Thailand or to Thailand itself is an important way for rural youth to find employment. Migration is seasonal and happens usually during the dry season when there is no work to do on the family farm. In interviews with villagers, policemen and local politicians in Phnom Penh, Battambang (town and province) and villages in Kampong Thom, the side effect of youth migration to Thailand was mentioned, namely that youth come back often addicted to drugs and their behaviour changed for the negative. This includes the formation of gangs with a display of hedonistic Thai life style (dyed hair, display of coolness), robbery to pay for drugs, and violent behaviour at home. Problems facing Cambodian migrants in Thailand are mistreatment, abuse, and exploitation by employers and supervisors, violence, limited access to education for young migrants, and lack of access to health care, spread of HIV, and drug use (Maltoni 2006:30). As Maltoni explained, the ‘migrant workforce is largely, and in some cases exclusively, employed in economic sectors characterized by harsh and dangerous working conditions, low salaries and requiring low-skilled workers’ (Maltoni 2006:26). In order to protect Cambodian migrant workers abroad, the Cambodian government and Thailand signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2003. The potential effects of this memorandum were not examined for this study and warrant future research in Thailand among present migrants and in Cambodia among returning migrants.

3.2.3. Drugs

The problem of drugs with youth migrants was mentioned frequently during the author’s interviews in Battambang province and Pailin municipality. According to the perception and observation of a commune police chief in Battambang province:

“The youth who migrate to Thailand work hard. There they take yama [methamphetamines] to be able to work hard. When they come back, they are addicted, and with their gang group they then use yama in the village. But they don’t make violence. The rich make violence and pay for drinking to become leaders [of a gang].”³³

This observation allows for several comments: first, police are unable to control gangs composed of children of the elite (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion). Second, it is widely believed that apart from local production of drugs, especially yama, many youth become drug addicted when they migrate to Thailand. However, local yama production produces independence of global trafficking streams and is done for local consumption. On 1 April 2007, a drug production site in Kampong Speu province (Treng Troyeung commune, Phnom Sruoch district) was discovered, holding two tons of raw materials for yama production. The discovery was made on a property owned by Chea Chung, two-star general

³² Interview in Battambang, 18 July 2007.

³³ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007.

and advisor to Nhiek Bun Chhay, Vice Prime Minister and FUNCINPEC Secretary-General (Cambodge Soir 2007). In June 2007, two-star general Chum Tong Heng, Deputy Cabinet Chief for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces high command, was arrested in connection with the Kampong Speu lab. The arrest brought speculations that the arrest may be political, as Chum Teng Hong works under CPP member General Ke Kim Yan (Ki Media 23 June 2007). On 15 August 2007, Oum Chhay, an advisor to National Assembly president Heng Samrin and at the same time president of Chhay Chhay Investment and president of the Banteay Meanchey chamber of commerce, was arrested in connection with the same laboratory (Ki Media 17 August 2007). On 1 August 2007, a yama laboratory in Phnom Penh was discovered. Among the confiscated items were a handgun, nine yama pills, and a machine for yama production (Ki Media 3 August 2007).

Drug-related violence (stealing, robbery, murder-robbery) is highly political, as the drug/yama trade and production within Cambodia is led from the top, often by army officers and police officers. In the Battambang province police commissariat, two officers from the anti-drug office were suspended for having been involved in the trade they were supposed to fight. They work again for the commissariat, yet in another function. A former policeman resigned from the commissariat's police force, because almost all officials were CPP members and heavily involved in drug trade.³⁴ In the towns of Pailin and Battambang, the police chiefs of both provinces are involved in trafficking, either directly or they turn a blind eye with the aim to extort money.

According to sources close to the private life of the district police chief of Battambang district, Thuch Ra, he tolerates brothels, drug trafficking, and gambling in order to extort money from brothel owners, drug traders, and gambling establishments. This income he shares with the chief of the Battambang provincial police as the latter has no direct contact to the persons and establishments in question. The ability to extort money from Battambang's underworld, according to the same sources, was also the reason why he refused promotion to deputy chief of the provincial police: although the position would have been higher and would have come with more public respect given the title, he would have lost the direct contact to his sources of income. Therefore, the involvement of highest ranks of police in shadow economies leaves trafficked girls in Pailin and Battambang brothels and drug addicted youth without coherent protection of the state and relegates them to the mercy of individual policemen. As Roeske noted, drugs are linked to human trafficking, abduction, prostitution, gambling, weapon smuggling, and blackmail, hence an extended network of shadow economic activities (Roeske 2002:6-17). A former policeman of the Battambang provincial police said that in 2001, he seized 500 pills of metamphetamines daily. At that time, drug use was confined to Battambang town. Now he said it has spread to his village and to other rural areas in Battambang province. Government measures, he complained, are not effective.³⁵

³⁴ Interview with a former policeman in Battambang, 18 July 2007.

³⁵ Interview with a former policeman in Battambang, 18 July 2007.

3.2.4. Mines and land conflicts

Apart from drug and human trafficking and a high migrant population, which are however not alien to other provinces in Cambodia, Pailin and Battambang can be distinguished in two ways from Phnom Penh and the rest of Cambodia:

First, mines: Pailin is the area with the highest density of land mines in Cambodia with negative effects on agriculture, health, and schooling as parents sometimes choose not to send their children to school given the danger of stepping on a land mine. The reason for this is that the area around Pailin experienced strong fighting in the 1990s when the Khmer Rouge leadership tried to prevent government soldiers from accessing the area by mining it, and government soldiers attempted to prevent the Khmer Rouge from accessing the areas under government control by mining it, too. The most affected communities in the entire Cambodia, according to data from Mine Action, are Stueng Kach commune in Sala Krau district, Pailin municipality, with a combined number of 79 accidents (28 in 2004, 37 in 2005, and 14 in 2006). The second highest accident rate in the same period happened in Traeng commune, Rotanak Mondol district, Battambang province with a combined number of 57 accidents (26 in 2004, 16 in 2005, 15 in 2006). Third comes Ba Yakha commune in Pailin district, Pailin municipality with a combined total of 39 accidents (15 in 2004, 19 in 2005, 5 in 2006).

Second, land conflicts: according to the director of a Battambang NGO, land conflicts in Battambang have a particular Khmer Rouge legacy: After integration of the Khmer Rouge controlled areas with the rest of Cambodia in the late 1990s, the Phnom Penh government agreed to give permanently to the Khmer Rouge commanders the battlefield land they controlled at that point. A lot of this land, however, was still forest land and was not cultivated after integration. As a consequence, in 1999, 2000 and 2001, people from outside the area arrived and cleared the forest for agricultural land. A conflict between the new arrivals and the former Khmer Rouge commanders ensued. This dispute quickly turned into a dispute between the new arrivals and business people, as the commanders sold the land to business developers. Under the original agreement with the Ministry of Defence, the Khmer Rouge commanders said they wanted to distribute the land under their control to their soldiers in order to demobilise them. Selling it was therefore illegal. The same NGO director continued to argue that disputes become more violent as poor people in search of land are put in jail and evicted forcefully from their lands.³⁶

The conflicts are unsolved to this day and show the complex web of problems in the border areas, in which outsiders come in search of employment and land and thus enter into a conflict of interest with the original population of the area. Worse, they are made responsible for crime as locals perceive them as drug addicts and troublemakers. In the perception of locals, the influx of outsiders has brought a number of problems (these are perceptions only, which could not be verified by existing literature): after the so-called 'integration' of the Khmer Rouge zones with the rest of Cambodia and the effective pacification of the area, a lot

³⁶ Interview in Battambang, 24 July 2007.

of families came to Battambang from other provinces in search of land and jobs. This led to conflicts with the original population. As the Deputy Police Inspector of Samlot district said:

“Violence is low in Samlot [village], because most people are former Khmer Rouge. People from outside Samlot want to make business here. Samlot district has lots of drug users, because there are a lot of outsiders here. But in Samlot village, there are not many outsiders. In other districts, other people are influenced from Thailand: there are economic zones, border entrances. Sampou Loun, Kom Reang and Poipet have most drug users. In Samlot district, drug users come from other places. The original inhabitants here don’t use drugs.”³⁷

An employee of the Samlot district police further explained:

“In Samlot [village], there are not many cases of violence. Most violence occurs in Poipet, Phnom Proek, Kom Reang, Sampou Loun, and Ma Lay [all former KR areas]. There are also most of the drugs. Drugs come from Laos, and Cambodia exports them to Thailand. These localities have large farming communities, and farmers need lots of energy to work in the fields, which they derive from yama. In Phnom Proek, yama was produced inside a car. There are a lot of drug sellers in Phnom Proek.”³⁸

A director of an NGO in Pailin critical of the old Khmer Rouge commanders argued similarly by naming three distinct groups of drug users: children of high-ranking officials, sex workers, and outsiders who come to Pailin province for seasonal farm work:

“During farm work they get an income of 6.000 Riel per day. When the work on the farm is over, they go to Thailand to work. When they come back, they use drugs. Some villages have 50, some 100, Psar Prum has even 150 of the farm workers. They rent land to build a hut. They are people from outside, who become drug addicts and have HIV.”³⁹

Interestingly, a CARE International study on the psycho-social wellbeing of children in the provinces of Banteay Meanchey (cities of Poipet and Sisophon) and Koh Kong (cities of Sre Ambel and Smach Meanchey) do not mention at all the fact that at least Banteay Meanchey was a Khmer Rouge stronghold until the late 1990s (Carswell et. al., no year). Although not being the focus of the study, it can be assumed that if the Khmer Rouge period still had effects on the wellbeing of children and adolescents, the report would not have been able to oversee such a significant factor. It rather suggests what the statistical overview at the beginning of this section showed: that the socio-economic development of the region is not different from the rest of Cambodia, with the notable exceptions of mines and land conflicts. Although land conflicts and forced evictions occur across Cambodia, the Battambang case has a direct link to the long lasting Khmer Rouge presence and the defection agreements between the government in Phnom Penh and high ranking Khmer Rouge commanders in the mid-1990s.

³⁷ Interview in Samlot, 22 July 2007.

³⁸ Interview in Samlot, 22 July 2007.

³⁹ Interview in Pailin, 20 July 2007.

This was confirmed by the director of a Phnom Penh-based NGO active in the field of democracy promotion. Asked about the impact of the war especially between the provinces with a long Khmer Rouge presence into the late 1990s and the rest of Cambodia, the director explained:

“regional variation does not so much consist in differences between provinces, but between towns and remote areas. The differences between towns and remote areas are access to resources. In remote areas there is no infrastructure, there are a lot of illiterates, people there don’t understand that information is useful to them. This makes people vulnerable to abuse.”⁴⁰

3.2.5. Geographical distribution of violence

As regards the geographical distribution of youth violence, Bavel was named as the most violent district in Battambang along with Ek Phnom district as regards youth violence, although causes for this could not be given by the interviewee. The prime example frequently mentioned was a case in which three drug-addicted youth gangsters from Bavel cut the throat of their aunt to steal money and gold. The existence of statistics on youth violence was denied in the Department of Social Affairs of Battambang province.⁴¹

What could be retrieved were statistics on violence in general, but which were not broken down by age. From this it appears, however, that physical violence is equally spread among the communes in Battambang and Pailin, but with a tendency to rise in the vicinity of the towns of Battambang and Pailin and with good access to the border. It would be too easy to blame this on a Khmer Rouge legacy of an extended war in Battambang into the 1990s:

Research in former Khmer Rouge controlled areas in Samlot, Pailin, Prum, and Kom Reang in July 2007 showed a highly diverse area, in which violence depends on the degree of isolation: whereas Pailin, Prum, and Kom Reang show high levels of youth violence especially in combination with alcohol and drug consumption, and also have busy trafficking routes of drugs and children, Samlot is a tranquil village which is 40 kilometres from the Thai border but without direct road connections. In Samlot, the virtual absence of youth violence, be it simple gangs or violence in relation to consumption of drugs and alcohol, was reasoned by the inhabitants as stemming from a high degree of social cohesion and homogeneity of the inhabitants: with only a few exceptions, all inhabitants of Samlot are former Khmer Rouge, and almost no outsiders have moved to Samlot village after 1996. Levels of income are still relatively equal, with the police chief being not considerably richer than the average farmer.⁴² The director of a Battambang based NGO argued similarly by saying that in the Khmer Rouge areas, there is no problem with youth violence as they are still under the strict control of the rule of law.⁴³ This was also mentioned by the deputy chief of the Samlot district police.⁴⁴ An

⁴⁰ Interview in Phnom Penh, 4 June 2007.

⁴¹ Interview in Battambang, 27 July 2007.

⁴² Interviews in Samlot district health centre and district police, 22 July 2007.

⁴³ Interview in Battambang, 20 July 2007.

⁴⁴ Interview in Samlot, 22 July 2007.

English teacher who had moved to the area argued that in Samlot village

“ostracism and rumours keep youth at bay. There is a lot of respect for the old people, youth are afraid of the old people. They lack education, but are busy with work for the family income, which they sometimes have to use to pay for illnesses of family members.”⁴⁵

Asked if he ever spoke about the Khmer Rouge past of the village, he said that he does not dare to. No-one would speak about it in Samlot.

The director of a Battambang based NGO argued that

“Battambang is a replica of what happens in Phnom Penh. In the rural areas, youth used to have other problems, there were indigenous conflicts: defence of male territory (Pagodas, villages), protection of interests of peace and security of oneself. But now the conflict goes far beyond that given the new economic opportunities: it has moved from protecting to taking, such as stealing motos. The conflicts have become more advanced, using intimidation: there will be conflict, if you don’t agree with me. This is a social and economic problem. It can also be a political conflict once youth form groups and protect their interests in the name of a political culture.”⁴⁶

Youth violence was considered a serious problem that affected live in the community in the urban centres of Phnom Penh and Battambang, and the provinces around these urban centres, Kampong Thom, Battambang and Pailin (interviews with villagers, policemen, and local politicians, all of which were of mixed political affiliations – Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), CPP, and FUNCINPEC).

This suggests first that the vicinity of urban life affects life in the rural areas near them; and second that the vicinity of the Thai border with its prevalence of drug and girl trafficking and illegal migration has produced a climate of volatile security. Local taxi drivers from the Pailin area said that youth in Pailin have easy access to Samurai swords, which they can buy across the border in Thailand. Wounds are often significant, with cuts in necks, and occasionally cut off ears. Drugs can be bought as easily from mototaxi drivers in Pailin town.⁴⁷ An NGO activist in Pailin added that it is particularly children from high-ranking officials who can afford to buy these drugs, and when they make trouble, are sometimes sent by their parents to one of the two drug rehabilitation centres which exist in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces. Conflicts erupted recently between the son of the chief of the Pailin provincial police and the nephew of the governor. The car of the police chief’s son crashed into the motorbike of the governor’s son. Carrying a gun, the police chief’s son started chasing the governor’s son his motorbike trying to shoot him. Consequently, the governor arrested the son of the police chief and sent him to the court in Battambang. After paying a fine of 2.500 US Dollars, the police chief’s son was released again.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interview in Samlot, 22 July 2007.

⁴⁶ Interview in Battambang, 20 July 2007.

⁴⁷ Interviews in Pailin, 21 and 22 July 2007.

⁴⁸ Interview in Pailin, 20 July 2007.

Interestingly, a deputy of the Pailin provincial police interviewed in his office complained that it is very difficult to send criminals to court as Pailin does not have any. The nearest court is in Battambang, but the costs to send criminals to Battambang for prosecution are significant. The government budget allocates 150 US Dollar per month to the criminal office of the Pailin provincial police. Every month, the criminal office deals with 3-4 cases of violence. One case incurs costs of 37 US Dollar, which results in overspending.⁴⁹

3.2.6. Summary: disparities and congruencies

In terms of regional variation and life worlds in areas of different war intensity, it can be noted that by now the former battlefields along the Thai border are comparable socio-economically to other areas in Cambodia as regards schooling, health care etc.: the Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey (CIPS) 2004 showed that the border areas, and in particular Battambang and Pailin do not range lowest in these factors but often the Western minority areas. This means that after the dissolution of the Khmer Rouge and the agreement between the Phnom Penh government and the Khmer Rouge leadership in Pailin, the post-civil war situation in the Thai-Cambodian border areas normalised in that the development there caught up with the socio-economic situation in the rest of the country. In the following, a stable political order was established, with the Khmer Rouge elite and their patronage networks in charge of the Pailin government and security apparatus. This formally ended the post-war not only in the Thai-Cambodian border areas 30 years after the fighting began in Samlot, but also for the rest of Cambodia: in Phnom Penh, the power question was solved between FUNCINPEC and CPP with the CPP preventing the takeover of Khmer Rouge defectors by FUNCINPEC and in the following practically eliminating FUNCINPEC as a viable political force. Country-wide, the end of fighting between government and Khmer Rouge ended the power struggle in the western parts, allowing it to slowly normalise socio-economically and establish political structures based on authoritarian patronage networks centred on the Khmer Rouge leadership: Pailin's Governor Y Chhean is a former ally of Pol Pot, his deputy is the son of former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary. Another active politician is Ven Dara, niece of Ta Mok, or O Lan, former Khmer Rouge fighter and deputy director of tourism (Fogarty 2008).

Still, however, there are two important factors, which distinguish the Thai-Cambodian border areas from other areas: mines and land conflicts, both a legacy of the Khmer Rouge. Pailin has the highest density of land mines in Cambodia owing to extended fighting between Khmer Rouge and government troops into the mid-1990s. Land conflicts date back to the integration of the Khmer Rouge controlled areas into the rest of Cambodia, when Phnom Penh agreed to hand over Khmer Rouge controlled land to the commanders for redistribution to their soldiers to help with demobilisation. Yet, the land was not redistributed but instead occupied by people who came into the areas between 1999 and 2001 in search of arable land, producing conflicts between the local population and new arrivals, and later conflicts between

⁴⁹ Interview in Pailin, 24 July 2007.

the new arrivals and business people, who had bought the land illegally from the former Khmer Rouge commanders.

The areas that were largely under control of the post-1979 government and thus had experienced a longer period of peace post 1993 than the Thai-Cambodian border areas are very similar as regards the socio-economic set up, and the wellbeing of children and youth is affected by the availability of drugs, infrastructure (such as schools, health care, hospitals), and employment rather than historical differences between the border and the central lands, which are vanishing in economic terms. The capital Phnom Penh is comparable in crime and drug abuse to the towns of Battambang and Pailin, which stick out owing to their vicinity to the border and the corresponding high levels of drug and human trafficking.

The minority areas in the West were exempted from this study in order to avoid oversimplification of how the different ethnic groups deal with the young generation. Investigation into this issue and potential differences between the Khmer majority and the various minorities as well as among the minority groups themselves warrants further studies.

4. Challenges and Perspectives for Youth in the Triple Transformation Process: Youth Gangs as Systems of Self-help

Interviewed in 2007, the director of a Phnom Penh based NGO argued in relation to the difficulty for youth (particularly the educated urban youth) to attain jobs:

“This job situation does not necessarily mean that young people go to gangsters or consume drugs, but it affects the behaviour in terms of hope and self-esteem, they have no confidence that they can become independent and achieve something.”⁵⁰

At the same time, being in a gang is synonymous with the creation of a system of self-help. This may be supported by parents. As one social worker in Battambang explained:

“before the addicted gangsters go to jail, they ask the young boys to buy drugs by giving them money. Their parents are poor, only give them a little money, such as 100 Riel [circa 0.03 US Dollar. Exchange rate as of 16 July 2007], but gangsters give them more. Young children go to the pagoda and steal things in the pagoda such as shoes during ceremonies. They then sell and give some money to their parents. Their parents cooperate with their children, and they don’t stop them, because they need the money. The youngest are around 10, they smoke and use drugs.”⁵¹

Poor parents, therefore, although not necessarily and always, may at times not be a disincentive for their children to leave gangs in cases in which children contribute to the family income through gang revenue. A dysfunctional education system perpetuates this situation and links with a lack of perspectives, which results in frustration.

⁵⁰ Interview in Phnom Penh, 23 May 2007.

⁵¹ Interview in Battambang, 16 July 2007.

Gender and Development for Cambodia explain that youth gangs are structured along patron-client relations. Gangsters thus transfer the social structure of Cambodian society into their gang microcosm. Youth join gangs, because gangs are associated with power, from two different perspectives: youth from rich backgrounds join or form gangs, in order to gain the respect of their peers with the knowledge that they are exempt from prosecution given the influence of their parents. Youth from poor backgrounds join gangs in order to gain protection from the rich leader. This protection may be from other gangs, or from the gang which the youth joined. This creates patron-client relations (*khsae*) within the gang and mirrors traditional power relations within Cambodian society ‘as youth gangs can be understood to mirror the practices of the powerful and corrupt within Cambodian society’ (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Executive Summary+Part Two). The top of these *khsae* consist of *knong*, positions of economic and/or political power, from which a *khsae* extends downwards. The person having *knong* is responsible for the security of his clients along the *khsae*:

“Beneath each *knong* are familial relations, friends, colleagues and connections. So, at the top of the hierarchy you have a *knong* (literally meaning back or spine), and beneath him or her, is his/her *khsae*. The length or the number of people in the *khsae* depends on the power, influence and wealth of the *knong*. The *khsae* serves as a means for the *knong* to increase ‘face’ (*muk muat*). The higher up the *khsae* you are, the more likely you may be called upon to prove your loyalty through action, but many on a *khsae*, may never be called upon for anything. Loyalty to a *knong* is mainly based on what the *knong* can offer in terms of opportunity and protection. If a *knong* is found lacking, one can transfer to another *khsae*. However, as a general rule, people can only have one *knong* and the higher one is up in the *khsae*, the more truth in the statement. To have multiple *knong* is to risk the possibility of them having divergent interests and thus being caught between ‘the tiger and the crocodile’ (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two).”

Judy Ledgerwood argues that patronage networks have their origin in Buddhist principles, which are still intact in the rural areas:

“This is how everything works in Cambodia. In a rural setting it is the clients who gives [sic] small gifts or labour while the village chief or other big guy will provide protection and assistance in an emergency. In Phnom Penh this relationship has become distorted because patron client relations have become almost entirely monetised. The little guys in the Khsae have to pass up money and what they give is supposed to be redistributed and sent back down. That’s why before elections the government gives goods away. They are proving that what goes up is being redistributed. In the city however, its [sic] about lust for power, and to switch it back is problematic (interview with Judy Ledgerwood in Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two).”

The difference between rich and poor becomes clear, when gang members are caught by the police. In many cases, parents buy their children out of police custody, which opens the door to corruption in police and judiciary (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part One). An unreliable justice system thus creates a ‘law of the jungle attitude where the only reliable

protection is to be at the top of the food chain' (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two).

Crucially, youth gangs are a means for excluded youth to create social mobility. As a consultant based in Phnom Penh argued, young men believe in their right to be patron both in the family and in the job, but as for the job, they do not get anywhere because no-one retires. So they form gangs and transfer patronage relationships to the gangs. Poor youth do not get anywhere either, because their low position in the patronage strings does not allow them to access resources. So they form gangs or join gangs and thereby access a social structure, which allows them to exercise their function as patron and access to certain resources, such as jobs in the informal sector, hence social mobility.⁵²

Traditionally, networks of patronage take over the function of conflict settlement (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two+Part Three). A *knong*, who has insufficient influence to settle a conflict, may ask his *knong* or a friend with *knong* for help. Access to networks of patronage is also beneficial for job search or vocational training. The advantages one can derive from this as youth may indeed last into adulthood: 'In Cambodia, perhaps more than most countries, it is not what you know, but whom you know that determines a young person's career' (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two). Youth gangs are thus 'a means of social representation' (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three). The transfer of social networks of the adult world to youth gangs – such as horizontal alliances between persons of influence (gang leaders) and vertical alliances between persons of lower and higher ranks for protection – shows that youth gangs are 'an adaptation of the system of patronage, as expressed by young people. In Cambodian society the people accept the oppressive, corrupt and violent behaviour of patrons in return for a degree of societal stability. Amongst young people, gangs have come to occupy a parallel position of necessary evil' (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three).

This shows that patron-client relations may not only be built within a gang, but also between a gang and higher ranking personalities: gang leaders may thus have *knong* with policemen, members of the National Assembly or the military, all of which may be from the same family as the respective gang leader (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three). One result of this is that 'without the guarantee of support from the top, the police are reluctant to chase up gang members from high-ranking families' (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part One).

Prostitution and human trafficking is a case in point. Women and children are especially affected from trafficking, and members of the police and judiciary often collude with traffickers and brothel owners in the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the victims of which are often of Vietnamese origin or members of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Ethnic Vietnamese are vulnerable due to their unclear legal status, which makes them targets of police harassments and victims of forced evictions

⁵² Interview in Phnom Penh, 5 July 2007.

and sexual exploitation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001:20-22).

Consequently, being part of a structure as described by Gender and Development enables youth who have ended up on the streets of Phnom Penh, Battambang or Pailin to find money, food, and social protection under the oversight of a gang leader, who is generally attached to a powerful family. Having been embraced by the gang as 'surrogate family', children and youth find ways to access resources outside formal channels.⁵³ An interview in June 2007 in Phnom Penh with a former gang member, who was number three of a leadership trio and whose father was an army general until the mid-1990s, alleged extended family connections of the gang leader to Chea Sim.⁵⁴ Being politically and economically well off is identical to either having good relations to the police or to being able to prevent them from bringing the case to court, in case the police have dared to temporarily arrest the son or daughter of the elite at all. Connections of youth gangs with businessmen in the trafficking of girls were indicated in Phnom Penh, although the active involvement of youth gangs with drug and girl traffickers did not seem to be the normal case. In rural areas, powerful people are commune and village chiefs, whose sons and sometimes daughters come to lead gangs. In urban slum areas, power is achieved by families of higher ranks owing to some degrees of relative wealth in their slum community, sometimes with links to girl and drug traffickers outside the slum area. In the words of a former gang member in a Phnom Penh slum:

"The gang members force the younger subservient gang members to steal, deal with drugs, and traffick girls. Girl trafficking is done like that: some gang members are very handsome. They act as if they have money. They then pretend to a girl that they want her as a girl friend. She falls in love and is then sold to an old guy with high positions in the government, or to a night club. Sometimes the girls are also sold to foreigners who then sell the girl abroad. To make the girls trust them, sometimes foreigners act like they wanted to marry the girl and go abroad with her. These foreigners act like tourists. They then talk to the hotel owner, he then tells them where to go to buy girls or the hotel owner gets in touch with the gangsters. Also, the gangsters sometimes just ask foreigners if they wanted a girl. As for gang rape, only rich gangs do it, because they have someone to back them, a father, uncle, or mother. As a result, the police will take them in only for a short time. With poor people, police are very strict. Poor people are scared of the police."⁵⁵

Gang rape, indeed, is a pertinent issue, but according to Gender and Development for Cambodia not only among elite children, but also among workers and jobless people. Gang rape (*bauk*) among gangs is essentially a bonding ritual, particularly in senior high school grades 11-12 (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three):

"In Cambodia, the transition from being a boy to becoming a man is often marked by an initial sexual occurrence. Through this, a precedent is set that weds the idea of masculinity to ongoing

⁵³ Milnitsky 2006:199 cit. Milnitsky-Sapiro et. al. 1995.

⁵⁴ Interview in Phnom Penh, 29 June 2007.

⁵⁵ Interview in Phnom Penh, 6 July 2007.

sexual experiences. For male youths seeking to practice masculinity, a shortage of both willing female sexual partners and the necessary financial resources to purchase sex, plausibly leads to a crisis in male identity. In this crisis they turn for assistance to their system of patronage - the gang. Through gang-raping prostitutes, youths overcome the social and economic obstacles to fulfilling their sense of masculinity. Through the activity of gang rape, gangsters are bound together as even their very sense of masculinity, is maintained by the workings of the gang. As gang members join together in *bauk* to meet perceived sexual needs, the very act of regular involvement arguably begins to create a sense of ritual. This plausibly results in involvement in *bauk*, not simply out of sexual desire, but out of a desire for group participation and belonging (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three)."

Another bonding ritual is the consumption of drugs. Sometimes, gangs also distinguish themselves from others by explicitly not taking drugs.⁵⁶ Most affected are high school students, sex workers, and workers. Sniffing glue is widespread among street children and poor people in the countryside. The exchange of needles fosters the spread of HIV/AIDS (Roeske 2002:6-17).

In conclusion of this chapter, it can be said that reasons of why youth join gangs are manifold, but they all seem to have in common the aim of attaining social visibility, which in turn is brought about by social, political and economic marginalisation: low or no educational opportunities, unemployment, material dependence on parents, uneven access to resources (land, education, health care, jobs), shadow economic activities (trafficking of drugs and people), domestic violence, resolution of conflicts through violence, and generational conflicts induced by a globalised youth culture. Youth thus become actors: 'youth enter political space as saboteurs; their potential for political sabotage comes from their incomplete subjugation to contexts, co-opters, and to their own power for action, response, and subversion in contexts of political definition' (Durham 2000:113).

5. Youth Violence in Cambodia's Post-war Society: Creating and Curbing Violence in the Political Setup

As we have seen, youth are exposed to several influences, which produce different reasons of why youth become violent. This implies different motivations and aims of violence. The five types of violence (political, social, personal enrichment, ritualised and situational)⁵⁷ can therefore be allocated to different groups of actors with different motivations and aims: as will be shown in this chapter, political and social violence is functionalised by Hun Sen in the form of the Pagoda Boys, formally known as *Pagoda Children, Intelligentsia and Student Association*. This is a CPP-affiliated organisation, which is associated with violence (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2004:13), linked to Prime Minister Hun Sen through patronage networks. The Pagoda Boys is an organisation of

⁵⁶ Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Three; Milnitsky 2006:200.

⁵⁷ For a different typology according to persons, opportunities and places see Kersten 2002:18.

reportedly 4000 male students ‘in their twenties from the provinces’.⁵⁸ They describe themselves as a ‘youth movement defending the Hun Sen government for critical elements in Cambodian society.’ They have been used by Phnom Penh municipal authorities to ‘break up anti-government demonstrations’.⁵⁹

Police forces reportedly do nothing in order to stop escalations by the Pagoda Boys (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee 2004:2). In addition, Hun Sen critical groups have already called off demonstrations fearing a violent response by the Pagoda Boys. In 2004, the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee compiled a list of demonstrations, which were suppressed by the authorities. The Pagoda Boys feature in some of them, and their reported activities can be seen as exemplary for the political tendencies and political functionalisation of the group. For instance, COMFREL cancelled a protest in February 2003 for the release of journalists arrested during the Thai riots in the month before (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee 2004:4). The Pagoda Boys were the key force in the escalation of the Thai riots (Hinton 2006:451-452), so COMFREL called off the demonstration when 200 members of the Pagoda Boys gathered on the day of the planned protest (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee 2004:4). In August 2003, the Khmer Front Party held a protest in Phnom Penh against the results of the general elections held in July. The demonstration had been forbidden by the municipal authorities, yet the same authorities allowed the Pagoda Boys to hold a counter demonstration in support of the election results (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee 2004:4). And in April 2004, striking workers in Phnom Penh claimed they had received death threats by the municipal police, who appeared at the site of the strike together with the Pagoda Boys (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee 2004:7).

Situational violence and violence with the aim of personal enrichment (gang rape, robbery or murder robbery) is executed, for instance, when gangsters are drug addicted or want to show off their wealth to gang members of lower rank. Gang rape can also be considered ritualised violence in that it strengthens male bonding and shows off a hedonistic ideal of masculinity. Importantly, traditional concepts of power, masculinity, discipline, punishment and violence are of importance to understand violence in youth gangs as they become part of a ritual that underlines masculinity and strengthens bonds within the group through a violent ritual of gang rape (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two+Part Three). However, where violence involves children of the political elite, impunity prevents the perpetrators from being imprisoned as they are either bailed out by their parents, or policemen are intimidated into releasing them (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003). Multiple interviews with former gang members, teachers, and social workers did not find an active role of women in gangs. They are usually regarded as decorative accessories of gang leaders, who want to show them off in order to gain the respect of their peers. They also may be the cause of a conflict, as members of different gangs sometimes fight over their girl friends, using them as trophy against a rival gang leader.

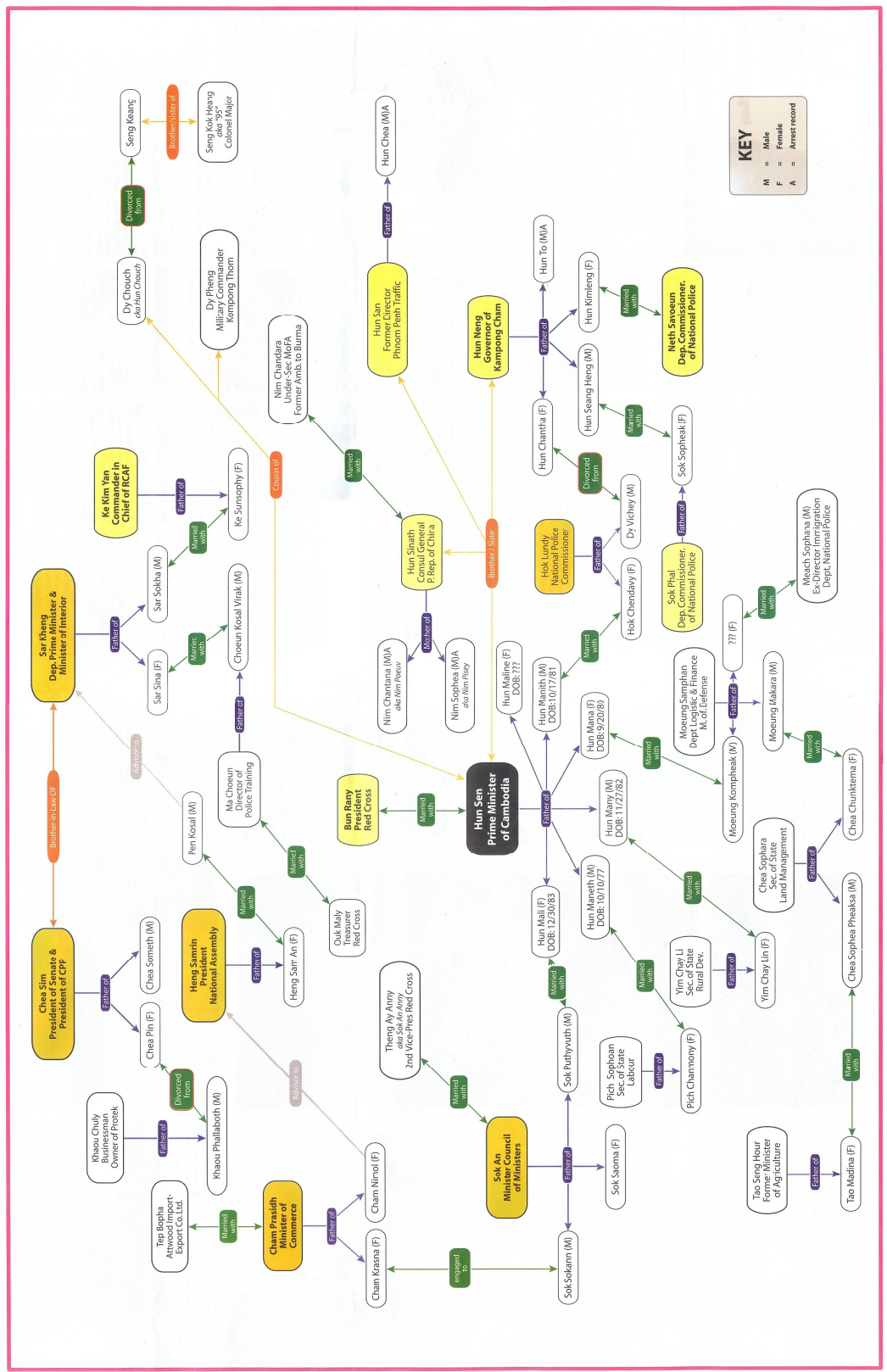
⁵⁸ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs 2003; Phann Ana 2003.

⁵⁹ Phann Ana 2003; Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs 2003.

5.1. Dualistic influences on youth violence: state and non-state channels

Overall, through the political system we can observe an authoritarian inclusion of youth within CPP-dominated networks. The point of departure here is firstly a post-war elite transition, which leads to a 1-party system in the polity, given the fact that in early 2006 the National Assembly voted to replace the two-thirds majority to form a government with a 50 plus 1 majority. This makes it potentially unnecessary for the CPP to enter into a coalition with FUNCINPEC if election results allow. Secondly, a familiarisation of influence within the polity is taking place. This is to say that through marriage policy, Hun Sen ensures that political influence within the CPP-dominated political system does not fall into the hands of party rivals, which centre on Chea Sim. This familiarisation was well shown by the Phnom Penh Post in February 2007 in a double-paged centre fold:

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Through this practice of marriage alliances, Hun Sen ensures his legacy. Part of this strategy of holding on to power is control over the young generations. Interviews with government officials exhibited inclinations of the government to exercise control over youth activities. Furthermore, NGOs claimed that Hun Sen constantly challenges them by creating his own organisations in order to rival Hun Sen-critical NGO organisations. The director of a Phnom Penh human rights NGO complained that the CPP-affiliated Pagoda Boys are pitted against NGO attempts to socialise youth. Thus, it emerges a dualistic influence on youth, which together with the inability of political parties to work together leads to a politicisation of social actors in Cambodia: students, police, gendarmerie, military, court prosecutors, unions, and the Buddhist leadership under the CPP-affiliated Great Supreme Patriarch Tep Vong.⁶⁰

A further example of politicisation of youth is through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is the Directorate General of Youth and Sports, chaired by Lak Sam Ath. The Youth Department in this Directorate General plans to create a youth centre office to train youth in information, education, and communication skills in all 24 provinces. Through its office of protection of rights of children and youth, it deals with problems such as trafficking and drug abuse. While this is all well-intended, through its office of youth associations the department also controls the activities of youth associations. The National Association of Cambodian Scouts, which is located in the Directorate General, provides a good example of how youth are politicised by political parties: originally created in 1934, Sihanouk abolished the scouts in the 1960s. Instead, he created his own organisation: the Jeunesse Socialiste Royaliste Khmère (JSRK). After the 1970 coup, the JSRK was abolished and the scouts recreated. In 1975, the scouts were abolished again. In 1979, the pioneer movement was created. In 1993, the scouts were recreated as CPP-affiliated organisation. Significantly, the JSRK were recreated, too, as part of FUNCINPEC.⁶¹ In effect, therefore, there were two scout organisations in Cambodia, which competed with each other for popularity among youth. On 26 April 2006, a General Meeting was called to merge both organisations and the National Association of Cambodian Scouts was created with CPP member Lak Sam Ath as president.

The politicisation along party lines creates fears. Interviews in Battambang province in July 2007 with a former policeman and a youth knowledgeable about drug selling networks revealed the fear of 'CPP spies', and requests were made to speak in low voice and at inconspicuous places.⁶² Both CPP supporters and CPP opponents regard political discrimination as a legacy of the war, which has produced a situation, in which the political parties are unable to work together. The situation is analysed from different political angles, however: Chap Sotharith, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute of Cooperation and Peace (CICP), survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime and a fervent CPP supporter, argues that the sudden arrival of political pluralism and the abolishment of the 1-party system in

⁶⁰ Interview in Phnom Penh, 10 August 2007.

⁶¹ Interview with Lak Sam Ath in Phnom Penh, 9 August 2007.

⁶² Interviews in Battambang, 18 July 2007 and 19 July 2007.

Cambodia after 1993 ‘has divided the people.’ He goes on to argue:

“when [opposition leader] Sam Rainsy attacks [Prime Minister] Hun Sen, he doesn’t know the situation in Cambodia. He said that ‘17th January [1979] is the day that Cambodia fell into Vietnamese occupation.’ But Vietnam came to liberate. Without the help of the Vietnamese army, I would have died.”⁶³

Another survivor of the Khmer Rouge and director of a Phnom Penh based NGO devoted to conflict transformation, is critically towards the CPP and the prime minister. He explains:

“Many of today’s politicians were awarded to be a politician due to affiliations with the party [CPP]. They did not become politicians because of their ability to think critically. The adultery law is a case in point: it was used to get rid of Ranariddh and therefore was driven by personal conflicts rather than the public interest.”⁶⁴

While familiarisation leads to accumulation of resources (money, land, education, health, jobs) within Hun Sen’s extended family network, it is also likely that this ensures loyalty of CPP-affiliated youth organisations to Hun Sen rather than Chea Sim or the CPP as such. Selective integration along patronage networks (Pagoda Boys, or the National Association of Cambodian Scouts) precipitates social exclusion for those youth, who choose not to join these organisations – or at least makes it harder for them to find access to resources outside the CPP framework.

The other influence on youth is through NGOs, i.e. the non-state sector. In general, NGOs supplement the governmental system of education, health care, and vocational training in order to achieve pro-poor social integration, that is, social integration of those sections of the population, which are not reached by governmental programmes. On an individual and social basis, NGOs deal with post-war social problems, which are perpetuated by the post-war elite transition and which can be regarded as risk factors affecting gang membership and violent behaviour among youth, collectively and individually: drugs, gambling, domestic violence, corruption in public education and health sectors, and unemployment. Distrust, hatred, and political discrimination are likely to increase the politicisation of society and, as a consequence, politically motivated violence. Also the treatment of traumas of war survivors is left to NGOs, as one victim in Battambang, who was a child in 1975, experienced separation from his parents during the Khmer Rouge, expulsion from the Thai border camps in 1979 and internal displacement, complained:

“I cannot sleep unless I take a sleeping pill. I cannot be alone at night when it is dark, unless I take medicine. The government does not care about this. There is no help from the government.”⁶⁵

This perception of government neglect of the psychological wounds falls in line with the argument of a staff member of a social development research centre in Phnom Penh. Involved

⁶³ Interview in Phnom Penh, 6 June 2007.

⁶⁴ Interview in Phnom Penh, 23 May 2007.

⁶⁵ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007

in awareness raising activities in relation to the Khmer Rouge past, he argued that the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, independent of its outcome, has produced a lot of activity in the non-state sectors in relation to public discussion forums in rural areas, e.g. of Kampot and Battambang provinces, which would not have been possible without the publicity the tribunal has created. The Documentation Center of Cambodia also published the first textbook on the Khmer Rouge period. And somewhat polemically he added: the government does nothing in this respect, they are too busy amassing land resources.⁶⁶ The director of a Phnom Penh based NGO dealing with democracy promotion argued similarly, namely that young people started to talk and ask questions about the Khmer Rouge past since the tribunal was set up.⁶⁷

One problem here is the neo-patrimonial system of governance, which combines political, economic, and social power, and which produces a governmental system, in which the delivery of services or some other form of concrete output for the population is not necessary for governmental legitimacy. Instead, patronage strings form as 'strongly intertwined interpersonal obligations, as each client is also a patron to a network of clients below. In times of need, clients located lower down the ksae seek help and intervention from the knorng directly above him, continuing the patron-client chain all the way to the top of the ksae as needed' (Pak et. al. 2007:51, also 57). Neo-patrimonialism, which had emerged since the late 1980s in Cambodia, is a bureaucratic and centralist form of governance, which uses patronage networks centred on people who hold positions in government and ruling party at the same time and combine political, economic, military, and administrative power through centralised patronage networks. These centralised networks are bolstered through traditional rural patronage, where the majority of the electorate lives.⁶⁸

A parallel structure was established with the party bodies of the CPP since 1979 (then called the Kampuchea People's Revolutionary Party KPRP), which ensured social control from the central to the village levels in those areas controlled by the Vietnam-installed government. This brought the state closer to the people in the hitherto self-sufficient villages (a process, which was started under the Khmer Rouge in the areas they controlled previous to 1975) and continued the tendency since Khmer Rouge times to elect local leaders not based on their personal prestige, but based on political reliability and backed by a state-party apparatus (for instance Gottesman 2003). Today's strong local support for the CPP in rural areas is a legacy of the 1980s policy of 'going down to the base', which was employed to bring party propaganda to the local population in order to strengthen CPP support against the guerrilla. Today, the same strategy is used to cultivate CPP patronage networks in the run up to national and local elections (Un 2005:221). The outcome has been very successful: in the first local elections in 2002, the CPP won all but 23 of the 1,621 communes. In the second local elections in April 2007, the CPP won 1,592 of the 1,621 communes.

The consequence of this bureaucratic form of patronage is explained in the observation of the director of a youth NGO in Phnom Penh:

⁶⁶ Interview in Phnom Penh, 5 June 2007.

⁶⁷ Interview in Phnom Penh, 4 June 2007.

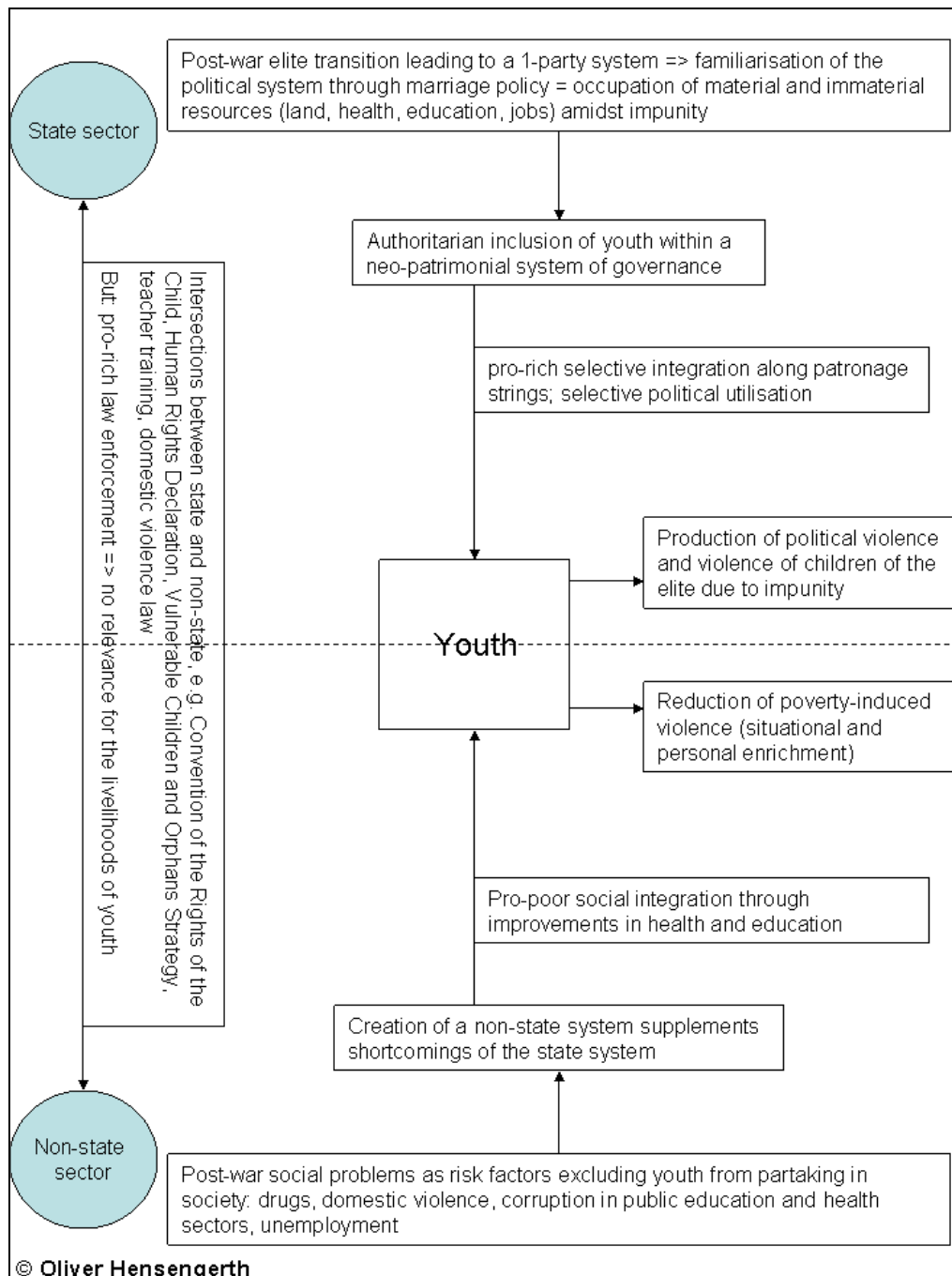
⁶⁸ Pak et. al. 2007:57-58; UN 2005.

“We try to teach students non-violence and anti-corruption and try to keep contact with them through our alumni network. But when students leave our programme because they graduate from university or marry, and when they enter the civil service or become teachers, they have to make a living, and this is often through corruption. The problem is that [... our organisation] is small, but society is large.”⁶⁹

NGOs, shortly summarised, attempt to bring young people back into society by giving them a perspective and alleviating frustration. In other words: NGOs try to do away with the above mentioned risk factors. What can be achieved in relation to violence is to curb poverty-induced violence in relation to personal enrichment and situational violence: drugs, domestic violence (illiteracy, awareness raising), and vocational training.

⁶⁹ Interview in Phnom Penh, 18 May 2007.

Figure: The dualistic influence on youth and the dichotomy of youth violence – as emerged from interviews



5.2. Intersections between the state and non-state systems

Ideally, this dichotomy is evened out by global and governmental initiatives aimed at society at large. In 2002, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth

Rehabilitation MoSALVY found a link between the inability of children and youth to access resources and their susceptibility for gang violence: faced with a situation, in which children are exposed to domestic violence, without education, health care or access to jobs, they run away from home, live on the street, drop out of school, or never go to school at all. Vulnerable groups are homeless children, truants, high school students, and unemployed children. Being thus vulnerable, gangs, which the report calls ‘dishonest groups’ headed by a big brother [bong thom, the equivalent term for gangster in Cambodia], tempt them into illegal activities such as ‘tricking, threatening, drugs or substance abuse’ which includes glue sniffing and heroin injections. On the order of the big brother, the younger members of the gang carry out criminal activities, although some acts are committed by individuals, not gangs. However, ‘most children have organized their group as a network and have a structure like an organization’ (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation 2002:38-39). The category of unemployed children is not further explained. It is probable that this includes street children, children in slums and those without work on the family farm during the dry season. The latter may then go to Phnom Penh to find temporary jobs to support themselves and the family back home. If they are unsuccessful, they usually end up on the street and are easily lured into gangs, through which they come into contact with drugs and, as a consequence, drug-related crime.

The most important international initiatives to bridge the gaps between the state and non-state sectors comprise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the Cambodian government in 1992)⁷⁰; the ILO convention 138 (Minimum Age Convention, ratified by the Cambodian government in 1999), which specifies a minimum working age of 15 years (14 depending on the situation of the individual country), and 13 years for light work (12 for individual countries)⁷¹; and the ILO convention 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, ratified by the Cambodian government in 2006), which sets an age limit of 18 for hazardous work.⁷² Specifically, hazardous work is defined as work in the following 16 sectors: portering, domestic service in private homes, water scavenging or rubbish picking, work in rubber plantations, work in tobacco plantations, fishing, work in semi-industrial agricultural plantations, brick-making, salt production and related enterprises, handicrafts and

⁷⁰ The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that ‘[f]or the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’ (Article 1). It specifies children’s civil, political, social, economic, and cultural.

⁷¹ The Minimum Age Convention specifies a minimum working age of 15 years, in exceptional cases 14 years (Article 2, para. 3 and 4). Hazardous work is permitted from the age of 18, in exceptional cases from the age of 16 (Article 3, para. 1 and 3). Light work, i.e. work that does not affect health and schooling or vocational training, is allowed from the age of 13-15, in exceptional cases from the age of 12-14 (Article 7).

⁷² The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention stipulates that ‘[f]or the purposes of the convention, the term child shall apply to all persons under the age of 18’ (Article 2). Article 3 states that the phrase ‘worst forms of child labour’ applies to ‘(a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.’

related enterprises, processing sea products, stone and granite breaking, rock and sand quarrying and stone collection, gem and coal mining, restaurant work, and begging (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:22, Table 4, for details see 29-32).

National initiatives comprise the Cambodian labour law, which applies the provisions of the ILO conventions in Articles 177-181 including prakas, ministerial orders, which qualify the provisions in the articles⁷³; the Vulnerable Children and Orphans Strategy (in the making); the National Youth Policy (in the making); and the domestic violence law. Further regulations relate to occupational health, children in rubber plantations, trafficking and sexual exploitation, or the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:45note68 and 45-46).

However, the problem is implementation. For instance, less than 2 percent of economically active children from 7 to 14 work in the formal sector. The Cambodian labour law, however, covers only those employed in the formal sector. In addition, only the formal sector is 'typically accessible to labour inspection regimes. Inspection capacity, however, is low, and systematic inspections do not occur even in the formal sector' (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:26). Moreover, informal workers are victims of police harassment, have no social protection or access to formal education and training institutions, are exposed to health risks in hazardous work, and are not represented by unions to demand improvement of working conditions or access to social security (Economic Institute of Cambodia 2006:19-23). Practical problems are the understaffing of the Department of Labour, lack of operational funds and logistical problems, lack of awareness of laws and enforcement systems among inspectors, unclear legal provisions for child labour, lack of registration procedures for child birth and child labour, and the fact that violations against legal provisions had not been prosecuted as of 2006 (ILO/ UNICEF/ World Bank 2006:46). Problems of implementation are coupled with mistrust towards the government and law makers as regards corruption and impunity:

"The government is very clever to produce documents, to pay experts to write down programmes. Children are like bamboo, but their protection is only on paper. How can you reduce poverty if you grab land from the poor. Actions and words contradict. Schools should be free, the salary of teachers raised. The money is there: the World Bank estimates that 300-600 million US Dollar are lost due to corruption. There is no political will. Teachers need to receive proper training, the quality of the academic level needs also to be increased."⁷⁴

"The National Assembly always says to go against corruption from top to bottom, but they do it themselves. How can we believe what they say?"⁷⁵

"There is no law enforcement at all."⁷⁶

⁷³ As of 2006, the following prakas had been adopted: on hazardous work (March 2004) and on light work for children between 12 and 14 years (April 2004). 5 prakas on child labour in the sectors plantation work, fishing, brick-making, salt production, garment and show making are to be approved (ILO, UNICEF and World Bank 2006:45).

⁷⁴ Interview with the director of a Phnom Penh human rights NGO, 10 August 2007.

⁷⁵ Interview with the director of a village NGO school, Battambang, 11 July 2007.

“No-one follows the laws passed by the national assembly. They set up the law, but don’t follow. And the bottom follows the top. Children are without law. There doesn’t seem to be law in Cambodia. Court takes bribes. I cannot say: ‘I like SRP, FUNCINPEC and so on.’ Food is not enough, medicine is not enough. We need to educate youth in order to prevent them from killing.”⁷⁷

In 2001, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted ‘a lack of political will to invest in education, which results in a low national budget for education and low awareness of the importance of education in the community. About half a million of the children aged 6-11 years have no access to education in Cambodia while 50 per cent of those who entered grade 1 either dropped out of school or had to repeat the class. Despite a large increase in school enrolment in recent years, less than 50 per cent of children reach grade 5 and less than 2 per cent graduate from high school. Some of the causes identified include the low quality and commitment of teachers owing to their low salaries and lack of expertise; the need for a child labour force which prevents children from attending school, especially in the case of young girls; the insufficient number of schools and the need to travel great distances to attend them in remote areas of the country’ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001:18). The UN Commission on Human Rights notes that the economic growth of 6.7 percent per year over the last decade (as of 2004) and international development aid have made no significant progress in the reduction of poverty as economic growth has largely bypassed the rural areas. An estimated 40-45 percent of the total population lives below the poverty line. An insufficient number of medical facilities, malnutrition, high infant mortality and a functional literacy of 37 percent of the population worsen the situation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2004:6-7). In the words of Kent: ‘for the poor, access to food, healthcare, jobs, education and impartial arbitrators of disputes is far from assured. The combination of this history of collective traumatising with today’s new inequalities has made the sense of trust, sharing and belonging perhaps the most significant and persistent casualty of the past’ (Kent 2006:348).

The dualistic influence on youth and grossly different starting positions depending on wealth and influence were summarised by a police officer of Svay Por Commune in Battambang district:

“Say, for example, that students failed their high school exams. Then there are two options: if they are poor, they go to the border into Thailand or work on the peanut and bean farms on the Cambodian side of the border. If they are rich, they hang around and sometimes their parents send them to private universities.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Interview with the physician in Battambang, 21 July 2007.

⁷⁷ Interview with the director of an AIDS NGO in Battambang, 11 July 2007.

⁷⁸ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007.

5.3. Gang violence as legitimacy problem for Hun Sen

It is central here that Hun Sen's call of 2003 to curb youth violence was in reality directed against poverty-induced violence. Poverty-induced violence as shown in the lower half of the figure above is a legitimacy problem for Hun Sen, and curbing it does not affect political utilisation of violence as depicted in the upper half of the figure. Since the vast majority of the countryside population votes CPP, and as interviews with villagers across four provinces (Battambang, Pailin, Kampong Thom, and Prey Veng) showed gang violence as serious security concern (Kampong Thom, Pailin, Battambang) or simply annoyance of peaceful countryside life (Prey Veng), reducing it – or exhibiting some activism towards that goal – means the abolishment of a security problem for the rural CPP clientele and consequently rising legitimacy for Hun Sen. At the same time, the formation of the neo-patrimonial system of governance ensures that the figure's upper half of youth violence remains entirely untouched. Hun Sen, who likes to talk about win-win situations, has indeed created one for himself, against the most vulnerable group within the population and against attempts by the non-state sector (NGOs, private schools) to integrate youth into society long term.

Essentially, police are unable to control gangs composed of youth with a rich family background. This was confirmed by the already quoted commune police chief in Battambang province:

“The youth who migrate to Thailand work hard. There they take yama [methamphetamines] to be able to work hard. When they come back, they are addicted, and with their gang group they then use yama in the village. But they don't make violence. The rich make violence and pay for drinking to become leader.”⁷⁹

Interestingly, it was mentioned frequently in interviews that gangs in poor quarters of Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Pailin are afraid of the police. Hun Sen's 2003 speech on cracking down on youth gangs might therefore have some effect on gangs comprised of poor children, whereas it is equally interesting to note that police became active against youth gangs only after Hun Sen had made his speech. This is to say that police come into action once a prime ministerial decree is published, that is, once the higher authority has approved action towards the resolution of a particular phenomenon. This way of tackling problems can be discerned from the comments of the same commune police chief:

“Gangs disturb the village, make trouble. Some gang members went to Thailand as migrant workers, and when they come back they use their earned money to make parties with their friends, drive motorbikes very fast, make noise, are violent. But since 2004, there is less violence, only conflicts like shouting and fast driving, because since 2004, the police force does more patrols.”⁸⁰

Asked by the author what triggered the reduction of gang violence in 2004, the police chief answered:

⁷⁹ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007.

⁸⁰ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007.

“There was a directive from the top to stop this violence. So I ordered the police to stop them. If they are in a group, then I know the group and invite them to my office to educate them. I also invite them if they take drugs.”

Consequently, it seems that Hun Sen has perceived gang violence as legitimacy problem for himself. Although there are no reliable statistics on this, policemen and villagers including one Sam Rainsy Party activist, mentioned that youth violence has become less since Hun Sen’s 2003 call. The Sam Rainsy activist added, however, that drug-related violence has increased.⁸¹ This was confirmed by an NGO activist in Pailin town.⁸² It seems thus that ‘normal’ gang violence has decreased, while drug-related violence, especially stealing and robbery, but also murder-robbery, has increased. However, acting against gangs does not affect gangs from rich and influential officials. It is interesting to note that the police chief argued that it is not the poor gangs who make the most trouble, but the rich gangs. It also does not affect groups such as the Pagoda Boys. Again, we have a pro-rich implementation of policies, which targets the poor gangs, but not those composed of or led by children of high-ranking officials.

One result of the selective political integration and the pro-rich implementation of laws (e.g. the new military service law, see below) is that it produces political violence through governmental instrumentalisation of youth organisations (Pagoda Boys), which in turn produces a climate of politicisation of all social actors. A second result is that it produces elite violence, that is, gang violence among children of the political elite, which is exempted from legal prosecution by virtue of their wealth and political influence. This produces a sense of lawlessness among the poorer population.

However, the notion of impunity of the elite needs one qualification: the case of Prince Norodom Charachak shows, how members of political parties other than the CPP can be subjected to police investigation and imprisonment even though they are related to family members in ministries. Norodom Charachak was arrested on 29 May 2007 as part of a 9-member gang for illegal possession of weapons (samurai swords), armed robbery, and gang involvement (Saing Soenthrith 29 May 2007). Norodom Charachak, who works as body guard in the Ministry of Interior, is son of Prince Chakrapong, who is vice president of the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP). It appears therefore that high-level protection for wrongdoers extend to the CPP, or even closer to the members of Hun Sen’s extended family network, whereas members of other parties run the risk of being exposed to the public. This produces two groups of elite children, one with close ties to the CPP and the prime minister, and another one that lacks these ties.

Another point of concern is the new military service law, passed on 25 October 2006. The law stipulates that 18 year old men have to serve 18 months in the military and therefore it creates general conscription. The law has no security relevance, and therefore the question of the rationale of the law arises. Interviewing an advisor to the general assembly, directors of

⁸¹ Interview in Battambang, 12 July 2007.

⁸² Interview in Pailin, 20 July 2007.

Phnom Penh based NGOs and the director of a youth organisation brought about the result that it is unclear of why the law was tabled.⁸³ However, it was argued by all interviewed persons that it is likely that the government attempts to bring two groups of youth under governmental control: one is youth critical of Hun Sen's regime and who regularly vote for opposition parties. Another, probably overlapping group, is comprised of high school graduates who cannot find jobs commensurate with their education. It appears therefore that Hun Sen attempts to draw away a critical mass of educated young men from NGOs and opposition parties (particularly the Sam Rainsy Party), and put them under government control. The rationale for the law is therefore social and economic, but not related to national security considerations. In this context it was complained that children of the political and business elite, particularly those with access to Hun Sen's extended family network, would most possibly be able to buy their way out of serving in the military.⁸⁴

5.4. A culture of violence?

The destruction of social relations and family bonds is often seen as cause for bad living conditions of children, particularly in relation to the growing number of street children, child abuse in the home, an increase in dangerous forms of child labour, and the growing numbers of children in sex trade.⁸⁵ The ruthlessness implicit in these actions is relegated to a culture of violence or a legitimacy of violence in conflict resolution due to violence legitimated by the state in carrying out its goals and a resulting brutalisation of social relations in the quest for individual survival in the midst of violent state action (Broadhurst, unpublished draft:3). At this point it is important to note the link between disintegration of social cohesion and the formation of youth gangs, as the latter take over social functions which society at large is not able to deliver:

“Gang life flourishes under conditions where civil society fails to provide adequate services that respond to the need of its members. [...] For example, where there is poverty and high unemployment, gangs provide members with the potential for work and income. Where there is a societal instability caused by violence and the lack of effective police and judicial services, gangs provide protection and street style justice. Where there is a lack of viable recreational options, gangs provide opportunities for fun. Where there is a need for family, friendship and status, gangs again provide a sense of belonging and respect through a community of comradeship where young people only have each other to rely on. In short young people join gangs for the assistance and opportunities they offer. Gang life brings meaning, purpose and belonging and until society becomes organized more efficiently to meet the needs of young people, the gang phenomenon will continue (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part Two).”

⁸³ Interview in Phnom Penh, 30 May 2007, 31 May 2007, and 1 June 2007.

⁸⁴ Interview in Phnom Penh, 1 June 2007.

⁸⁵ Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:7 and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001:20-21.

Daiute explains that participation of youth in violent conflicts occurs in societies, in which processes of political and economic transformation intersect with border disputes, competition for resources and conflicts of sovereignty. Youth violence is therefore not the result of bad character or misguided judgment, but a ‘social practice – an activity characterized by circumstances, goals, expectations, behaviors, and discourses in particular contexts’ (Daiute 2006:9). Higson-Smith argues similarly by noting that youth violence is not simply a result of poverty, but lies deeper in the social, political, and economic transformations (Higson-Smith 2006:179). Rightfully, therefore, Olawale argues that youth are affected by state collapse and that a negative youth culture constitutes a result of state collapse, not, however, a cause of it:

“during wars, youth are socialized into a culture of unrestrained, indiscriminate violence and the social catharses (taboos) that mediates sanity and civility is shattered. To characterise the pre-war youth culture as negative and central to state collapse is to be oblivious of the underlining nature of youth culture as a provider of cognitive materials from which to develop an alternative career, kept secret from, and in rebellion with, the adult world.”⁸⁶

This indicates a banalisation of violence in everyday life as model for conflict resolution. Keng Menglang argues in this context:

“As a result of the legacy of conflict, Cambodians have in large part been socially conditioned to settle disputes by resort to weapons. As a result, small arms and light weapons are now being used by those with the greatest access to them, to settle or claim resources as their own (Keng Menglang 2003:23).”

Barnitz, Path and Catalla agree that the civil war normalised the practice of a settlement of conflicts by use of weapons (Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:4-7). This established a ‘culture of violence that surrounds the prevalence and easy accessibility of guns and the corruption of the public servants, namely police and military personnel, who wield them’ (Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:5). Children, therefore, ‘come to conclude that force determines the social order and that there are only winners and losers’ (Hart/ Mojica 2006:248)⁸⁷. In his work with Cambodian refugees suffering from the ‘concentration camp syndrome’, Kinzie identified ‘emotional numbing’ resulting in a lack of emotional bonds toward their spouses and children and a potential for child abuse, aggressiveness, and family violence in some refugees (Kinzie 1987:332+338+Tables 2+3+343+344). Barnitz, Path and Catalla add that years of fear and violence, family separation, poverty, hunger, and impunity of excombatants, particularly from the Khmer Rouge period, led to health problems such as sleep disturbances, memory difficulties, depression, apathy, and aggressiveness. This is especially true for today’s generation of adults, who were children during the Khmer Rouge period (Barnitz/ Path/ Catalla 2001:4).⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Olawale 2004: 5 cited Brake 1980:166.

⁸⁷ See also the report of the International Committee of the Red Cross 1999.

⁸⁸ For the problem of impunity see also International Committee of the Red Cross 1999:35.

6. Conclusion: Youth Violence in Post-war Cambodia

We have seen that youth gangs form as response to social, political, and economic marginalisation. Three underlying processes influence the level of youth violence:

First, war disrupted traditional family networks, produced a culture of distrust and fear, and destroyed social and economic infrastructure fundamental to children and youth development. This resulted in social exclusion of poor children from resources: education, health care, and jobs. Thus, gangs provide here an alternative path of how to attain at least some of these resources. NGOs are active in the field of supplementing the state sectors, which are ridden with corruption and therefore inaccessible for most poor children and youth.

Second, rapid social change brought urbanisation, migration and globalisation, through which youth emerged as a distinct consumer group, and which produced a difficult economic situation for children and youth, forcing them to migrate to the centres of economic growth, where they can be easily picked up by youth gangs in the form of surrogate families.

Third, since 1979 we have seen an authoritarian reconstruction of patronage networks under CPP dominance, and particularly under Hun Sen's control, through which resources are allocated to the extended family network of Hun Sen. Since UNTAC, this has taken place within the triple transformation process of democratisation, pacification and marketisation. It is here where political instrumentalisation of youth comes in. In the form of the Pagoda Boys, Hun Sen ensures a selective integration of a particular group of youth into CPP-dominated structures. This allows him to functionalise them for regime support, that is, for the preservation of the status quo.

Regionally, the level of youth violence is dependent on geographical isolation and openness to outside influences: comparable are the cities of Phnom Penh, Battambang and Pailin including their surrounding areas. Drug-related crime is most common, whereas at least in Battambang province the level of 'normal' gang violence is decreasing, but drug-related violence is increasing. Not surprisingly, remote areas without proper roads and good access to border areas are not penetrated by trafficking routes for drugs and people. They often also show a good degree of social control, particularly in the former Khmer Rouge areas, where UNTAC's influence did not reach to an extent that would be comparable to Phnom Penh.

As regards types of violence, motivation for and direction of violence, it can be argued that the political system fosters youth violence in the following ways:

First, there is elite violence, that is, children of government officials, army and police officers form gangs and commit violent acts using knives, samurai swords, and guns. This can be regarded as situational violence induced by alcohol and drugs. However, being exempted from legal prosecution through a pro-rich implementation of laws, reducing this type of violence is directly linked to the political set up. In these gangs, the lower strata are often formed by poorer youth, who might have come from the countryside in search of jobs, but were picked up by gangs as surrogate family. Or youth join a gang in order to be protected from another gang. Being in a gang is therefore synonymous with the creation of a system of self-help, which may be supported by poor parents.

Different from this is a selective integration of youth for political purposes through the prime minister. This leads to political violence as well as social violence in that the prime minister functionalises youth for his purpose of political survival and cementation of the political status quo (Pagoda Boys), thereby producing a climate of politicisation of all social actors in Cambodia. The case of Prince Norodom Charachak has shown how this political protection of gangs extends mostly to Hun Sen's extended family network, but does not even reach employees of government ministries. Therefore, high-level protection for wrongdoers extends to the CPP, or even closer to the members of Hun Sen's extended family network, whereas members of other parties run the risk of being exposed to the public. With negative effects for social integration of youth, this results in a pro and anti-Hun Sen politicisation of youth with corresponding good or difficult access to resources handed out by Hun Sen and the members of his familiar network.

Second, as a consequence of the political set up, there is poverty-induced violence: the selective integration through the political system leaves the majority of poor youth out of the distribution of wealth (land, jobs, education, health care). Gangs are formed to overcome this and create a parallel structure which caters to the social and economic needs of youth (such as jobs in the informal system). NGOs here try to supplement the governmental system of education, health care, and vocational training in order to achieve pro-poor social integration of those not reached by governmental programmes. The informal sector thus deals with post-war social problems, which are perpetuated by post-war elite transition and which affect gang membership and violent behaviour among youth. These risk factors are drugs, gambling, domestic violence (illiteracy, awareness raising), corruption in public education and health, as well as unemployment

Violence for personal enrichment is common among both poorer and richer youth and is often a form of drug-related violence to finance drug addiction. Drug trade is guided from the top, whereby the poor buy from the rich and in turn engage in stealing and robbery to buy more drugs. A vicious cycle is set in motion, a stop to which can be executed only with a stop to drug trade and domestic drug production in the hands of local army and police officers. Again, these army and police officers are normally exempt from prosecution or are able to significantly reduce their sentence when they are linked to the CPP or Hun Sen's extended family network.

As regards ritualised violence, gang rape and drug taking are important bonding activities among the male group members and, in the case of gang rape, are an exhibition of potent masculinity. Furthermore, as reported by Gender and Development for Cambodia, three defined steps of conflict escalation from provocative staring (*meul muk*) to provocative talking and gesturing (*phar* and *dhoo*) and to starting an argument with the opponent (*thar jum jum*) are designed to challenge the authority of the opponent before going into physical violence should the other one not shy away beforehand (Gender and Development for Cambodia 2003:Part 3.4).

In this socio-political set up, political youth violence is likely to grow as there are few efforts (e.g. the new military service law) and no sustainable mechanisms or policies for inclusion (deficits in the education system, lack of job opportunities, problems with the implementation

of well-intended policies such as the Cambodian labour law). In addition, youth violence is strongly politicised due to a growing lack of regime legitimacy, which fosters repressive regime stability and a familiarisation of Hun Sen's influence through marriage policy. Youth groups, which can be instrumentalised, are therefore essential to give Hun Sen's rule a legitimate outlook beyond local and national elections. A politicised youth, especially in the face of high unemployment among school and university graduates, is therefore an element of Hun Sen's political survival.

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